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HOUSE OF THE HATCHET

by

ROBERT BLOCH

Jules de Grandin
in

THE MANSION OF UNHOLY MAGIC

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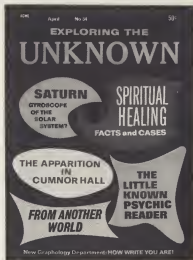
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Volume 1

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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Introduction

HERE IS THE first issue of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES, offering you classic bizarre tales and old-time favorites of uncanny mystery that have long been unavailable, as well as new tales of strange and eerie mysteries beyond the scope of the mundane crime reports that you read in the daily papers.

Our range is as wide as the range of terror in the world, both visible and invisible. Mystery both natural and un-natural is our province; the only restriction in the "natural" section is that it be truly *unusual*. If the matter of a crime itself in our pages seems commonplace, then you may be sure that you will find something outre lurking behind the surface — perhaps in the manner in which the truth was brought to light, perhaps in the motivation for the deed, or again in the way through which justice was achieved.

For our first issue, we have lined up a number of well-known authors of our type of fiction, and we have searched diligently for stories which are not only memorably good, but which are not available at anything like the price you pay for this issue. We know that some of you will have purchased hardcover collections of tales by some of these authors which may contain a story or stories presented here; and softcover collections are coming out so thick and fast that what might not have been available at the time we sent off the copy to the printers may be staring you in the face at your local newsstands before you see this issue. But the odds are in our favor, and in yours; even if you have read one or two of these stories, or seen them in recently-appearing softcover collections, you will still get your money's worth in each issue of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES. Let's look at our present lineup:

— Why should the entire population of a small, isolated village

commit suicide by jumping from a high cliff? Was this suicide? If it was not, how was such mass murder accomplished without leaving any traces? Edward D. Hoch calls in his famous detective, Simon Ark, to solve the mystery of *Village of the Dead*.

— Have you ever been in a place, or a house, where the whole atmosphere felt *evil*? Could such an atmosphere be so powerful as to drive a person to murder? You'll find Robert Bloch's views upon this question as he looks into the mystery of the *House of the Hatchet*.

— Despite the counter-propaganda of the utterly lovable Munster family, every now and then we do hear about real, genuine *monsters*. Not necessarily giants, but vicious things which destroy, mutilate, devour. What was the connection between the vanished Martense family and the horror which made the entire area around the old mansion a focal point of *The Lurking Fear*? That master of weird literature, hailed as the greatest since Edgar Allan Poe, H. P. Lovecraft, has the answer to this mystery.

Nor have we neglected the old master himself. Some of you have read him "from cover to cover" but to many of you his stories will be new, even though you may have seen various films based upon his works. Herein he relates how a perfect crime was solved by *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

August Derleth is best known to lovers of mystery fiction for his delightful pastiches of Sherlock Holmes, in the adventures of Solar Pons. We hope to bring you some of these in future issues; this time, we offer you his account of the strange and somewhat frightening riddle of *Ferguson's Capsules*.

Strange cults abound today, as they have throughout history, and ritual murder is not entirely a thing of the past. Gerald W. Page reveals the horrifying secret of the grisly series of murders that took place near a seashore hotel in *The Off-Season*.

The greatest mysteries lie in the human psyche, and among them is the mystery of why some person may seem to be overwhelmed by a feeling of guilt which he cannot pin down. Modern psychotherapy is able to cure many such cases, but S. B. Hurst tells of one which defied ordinary professional skill in his story of a judge who was burdened by a feeling of having perpetrated *The Awful Injustice*.

And, finally today, as we read about modern witchcraft cults, and even read interviews with a practicing witch now and then, we begin to wonder at times if there might really be something in so-called black magic and white magic. The former, of course, makes for the most gripping fiction, and Seabury Quinn presents his well-loved and famous occult detective, Jules de Grandin, to uncover and combat the mystery and menace in *The Mansion of Unholy Magic*.

WE HOPE YOU enjoy this issue of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES. After you have read it, we should like to hear from you; and for that reason, we have inserted a readers' preference page (double-barrelled so that you can cut it out without losing part of a story.) We have found that this sort of coupon seems to make it easier for many readers to vote on the stories, although any listing which rates more than one story comparatively can be counted, whether it comes on a preference page, letter, or post card, etc. On the preference page you will find the titles of all the stories in this issue, and a brief explanation of the symbols which will be of most help to us when you vote. On the other side of the page, we provide space for comment, for titles of stories you would like us to obtain if we can, for names of authors you would like to see in future issues. As in MAGAZINE OF HORROR, we will consider all such requests, and follow them whenever possible. RAWL

Robert A. W. Lowndes

Village of The Dead

by Edward D. Hoch

PERHAPS, IF you're old enough you remember the Gidaz Horror. At least that was the name the newspapers gave it during those days when the story shocked the world.

I was near Gidaz when the thing happened, and I suppose I was one of the first to reach the village. I went without sleep for forty-eight hours to get the story and then I never

could use it. All these years I've thought about it, and I guess sooner or later I just had to tell someone.

So this is the way it happened, that day in Gidaz . . .

I was at the state capitol, covering a political story, when the flash came in. We crowded around the teletype in the press room and watched the

Simon Ark grapples with the uncanny riddle
of a mass suicide.

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words as they formed on the yellow paper:

... THE TINY VILLAGE OF GIDAZ, IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE STATE, WAS THE SCENE TODAY OF AN APPARENT MASS SUICIDE. A MAIL TRUCK, ARRIVING IN THE VILLAGE THIS MORNING, FOUND THE HOUSES DESERTED, AND, AT THE BASE OF A HUNDRED FOOT CLIFF NEARBY, SCORES OF BODIES WERE FOUND AMONG THE ROCKS . . .

That was all. There was more to follow, but none of us waited to see it. Ten minutes later we were in a car heading south, toward the village of Gidaz, eighty miles away.

It was almost evening when we arrived, but there were no lights in the village. The streets and the few dozen houses that clustered around them were dark and silent. It was as if the entire population had suddenly vanished.

And in a way it had.

We found people and cars at the edge of the village, but the people were not toiling silently as at the scene of a train wreck or a fire. They only stood at the edge of the cliff and looked down at the rocks below.

We joined them at the edge, and I saw it, too. In the reflected glare of a dozen headlights and in the dying glow of the

setting sun, I saw the bodies on the rocks below. There must have been nearly a hundred of them, men, women, and children. I could almost imagine a giant hand sweeping them over the edge to their death.

Presently we made our way down the steep path to the bottom, and men began to set up floodlights for the long job ahead. They were piled on top of each other, among the pointed rocks that stretched upward toward the sky.

"Think any of them could be alive?" I heard myself asking.

"Not a chance. A hundred feet is a long way to fall, especially with rocks like these at the bottom."

"Yeah . . ."

And they began moving the bodies. An old man with his skull shattered by the fall, a girl with her neck broken . . .

They carried them from the rocks and laid the bodies in neat rows on the ground. Soon there were only the red-stained rocks remaining. And I counted the bodies, along with the others. "Seventy-three . . ."

A state trooper joined the group at the foot of the cliff. "We've gone through every house in the village; there's not a living thing up there . . ."

"The entire village walked over the edge of that cliff sometime last night . . ."

After that the deserted village

of Gidaz was alive with reporters and photographers from all over the country. They wrote a million words about the Gidaz Horror. Seventy-three people, the entire population of the village of Gidaz, had committed suicide by walking off the edge of a cliff. Why? What had driven them to it? That was the question we all wanted to answer.

But there was no answer.

A New York paper compared it to an incident during the Napoleonic Wars, when a charging cavalry had ridden over the edge of a cliff before they realized their error. A national magazine brought up the legend of the Pied Piper, and suggested that some supernatural force had lured them to their death.

But still there was no answer.

The houses were searched for clues, but yielded nothing. In some places, food was still on the table. In others, people had been preparing for bed. It must have been around eight o'clock when something brought them from their houses. There were no notes or messages remaining. Apparently they had planned to return when they left their houses for the last time.

But they had not returned . . .

I WAS THE first one to think of digging into the background

of the town, and I spent most of the first night in the deserted building that had once held town meetings. There were records here — records and memories of days past, when Gidaz had been founded by a group of settlers pushing westward. It had been named after one of them, and had grown rapidly after the discovery of gold nearby.

I studied one of the old maps I found, and decided that the gold mines must have been almost at the spot where those seventy-three persons had plunged over the cliff to their deaths.

It was while I was looking at the map that I suddenly became aware that I was not alone in the old building. I turned and pointed my flashlight at a dark corner, and a tall man stepped out of the shadows. "Good evening," he said quietly.

"Who are you?"

"My name is not important, but you may call me Simon Ark if you wish."

"Simon Ark?"

"That is correct," the stranger replied. "And now may I ask you who you are?"

"I'm a reporter, a newspaper reporter. I came down from the state capitol to cover the story."

"Ah, and you thought you might find something in the old

records of the village? I also had a similar thought."

The man called Simon Ark had advanced closer now, and I could make out his features clearly in the light from my flash. He was not old, and yet his face had tiny lines of age to be seen if one looked closely enough. In a way he was perhaps a very handsome man, and yet I somehow could not imagine women ever being attracted to him.

"Are you a writer or something?" I asked him.

"No. I am simply an investigator; I make a hobby of investigating any strange or unexplained happenings in the world."

"How did you manage to get here so quickly?"

"I was in the area, just across the state line, on another mission. I would have been here sooner, but it is very difficult to reach Gidaz by road."

"It certainly is. The village is almost completely cut off from the rest of the town. Ever since the gold mines died out, the place has been almost a ghost town."

"And yet," Simon Ark said quietly, "there were seventy-three people remaining here. Why did they remain, I wonder; why didn't they leave this dying village?"

"They've left it now," I said;

"they left it last night when they walked over the cliff."

"Yes . . ." And the man called Simon Ark left the ancient building. I followed him outside, to see where he would go.

He was a strange man, strange in many ways. He seemed almost to be from another world or another time as he walked slowly along the dirt road that led through the center of the dead village.

The reporters and the police had already searched the houses, but he seemed to be looking for something more . . .

SOON, HE had almost disappeared in the darkness, and I hurried after him. When I finally reached him, he was bending over a dark spot on the ground. I could see only by the light of the moon overhead, but he seemed excited by what he had found.

"There has been a fire here recently," he said, almost to himself. He pulled something from the ashes and attempted to brush it off. It looked as if it had once been a book, but in the dim light it was impossible to tell more.

I had not realized the utter silence of the night around us until that moment, when it was suddenly shattered by the distant sound of an approaching car.

"Someone's coming," I said.

"Odd . . ." And a strange expression passed quickly over the face of Simon Ark.

He pushed the remains of the charred book into his top-coat pocket and walked back toward the dirt road.

Simon Ark stepped in front of the car and held up both hands, like some ancient high priest calling upon the gods above. A chill ran down my spine as I watched him.

The car, a light green convertible, came to an abrupt halt, and a girl climbed out from behind the wheel. "Are you the police?" she asked him.

"No, only an investigator. This other gentleman is a reporter." She noticed me then for the first time, and the tense look on her face softened.

"I'm Shelly Constance," she said. "I . . . I used to live here."

Simon Ark introduced himself. "You had a family still living here in Gidaz?" he asked quietly.

"Yes . . . My father and brother . . . I . . . I heard on the radio what happened last night. I came as soon as I could . . ."

"It would have been wiser to stay away," Simon Ark told her. "Your father and brother are beyond all worldly aid now, and the evil of Gidaz still fills the air, mingled now with the odor of death."

"I . . . I must see them," she said. "Where did it happen?"

Simon Ark motioned toward the distant cliff and led the way through the darkness. "The bodies have been covered with canvas for the night," he told her. "I believe the plans are to bury them tomorrow in a mass grave at the bottom of the cliff. Most of them, of course, have no living relatives."

We reached the edge, and I played my flashlight down on the rocks below, but nothing could be seen from that far up. In the light of the flash, however, I got my first good look at the girl by my side. She was young and tall and pretty in a casual sort of way. Her blonde hair hung to her shoulders, and helped to set off the lines of her face.

"Tell me," I asked, as we walked back to her car, "why did you ever leave Gidaz?"

"That is a long story," she said, "but perhaps it has something to do with this horrible thing. Come, come into my . . . house over here for a few minutes, and I'll try to tell you about it."

SIMON ARK and I followed her in silence to one of the houses just off the main road. It seemed strange entering this house that no longer belonged to the living. There were things, dishes and books and clothing and cigarettes and food, that were reminders of the people

who had lived here. On the wall was a map of the gold mining area, where some of these people had continued to work until yesterday, in the futile hope of recovering the village's lost greatness.

It was then, as the girl entered this dead house that had once been home, that she seemed to go to pieces. She began sobbing, and threw herself into a big armchair to cover her face. I remained where I was and let her cry. There was no way to comfort this girl who was almost a stranger to me.

I noticed that Simon Ark also left her to her sorrow and moved over to inspect the small bookcase in the dining room. After a moment's hesitation I joined him and glanced at the titles on the shelves. They were mostly children's books, with a few others that had probably served as college textbooks. One, an ancient history book, was stamped State University.

This seemed to remind Simon Ark of the charred remains of the book he had found earlier. He removed it from his pocket and carefully examined it. A few charred pieces drifted to the floor.

"It seems to be . . ." Simon Ark began, and then fell silent.

"What?"

"Ah, yes, *The Confessions Of Saint Augustine*. A truly remark-

able book. Did you ever read it?"

"No, I'm not a Catholic," I replied.

"Augustine wrote for all men," Simon Ark said slowly; "this is a very interesting discovery."

"Why should anyone want to burn it?"

"I am beginning to fear that I know the answer to that," he told me, and there was something in his voice that scared even me.

He returned the remains of the book to his pocket as the girl joined us again. "I'm sorry," she said. "Please forgive me."

"Certainly," I told her; "we understand."

"I'll see if I can fix us coffee or something," and she disappeared into the kitchen.

Presently she returned, with three steaming cups, and as we drank she told us of her early life in Gidaz . . .

".. I suppose it was about five years ago when I left to attend college. Of course, I was home for the summers, but for the first two years things seemed the same as they had always been in Gidaz. Then, in the summer following my third year at the University, I returned home to find things had changed slightly."

"In what way?"

"Well, I suppose it would be hard for you to understand, because it was really nothing I

could put my finger on. It seemed to be just a change in attitude at first. They talked of a man who had come to Gidaz — a man named Axidus, who seemed to have a great influence on their lives from then on. Of course, you must realize that Gidaz is so remote from other cities that these seventy-three people were forced to live entirely among themselves. My father and brother usually got into town about once every month or two. To them, the village was everything, even though it was slowly dying. A few of the men kept working in the mines, finding just enough gold to keep them alive. Others worked small farms in the valley. But they were happy here, probably because they had never known anything better."

"But you were not satisfied with it?"

"I wasn't the only one. Many of the young people like me left Gidaz, especially after the coming of this man Axidus."

SIMON ARK'S face had grown dark while she talked. "You say his name was Axidus?"

"Yes, do you know him?"

"I may have met him once, long ago . . ."

"Well, he was the cause of all the trouble, and I saw that right away. When I came home for Christmas that year, it was as if a madness had seized the

people. They talked of nothing but Axidus, and how he was going to help them save themselves. He seemed to have some kind of new religion . . ."

I glanced at Simon Ark, but his face was like stone. Once again I seemed to feel a shiver run down my spine.

"It really scared me, the way they all believed in him so completely," she continued. "Once each week he held a meeting in the old town hall, and everyone would go to hear him — even the children. It was uncanny, the way he seemed to know everything that happened in the village. He would tell people secret facts that no one else could possibly have known. When I was away at school, he would tell my father everything I was doing. Of course, people like the people of Gidaz have always been attracted by fortune-tellers and the like, and a person like Axidus knew exactly how to get them in his power. I went to see him just once, and I must admit I found something strangely haunting about this man Axidus."

"What did he look like?" I asked.

"He was fairly tall, with a white beard that hung to his chest. His hair was long and white, too, and he wore a white robe. He would come out on the small platform at one end of the hall and begin talking

without any introduction. Afterward, he just seemed to disappear. Sometimes people would see him around the village during the week, too, but always in this white robe. No one knew where or how he lived."

"It's fantastic," I said; "it sounds like something out of the dark past."

Simon Ark frowned. "It is dark, and it is certainly from the past. My only wish is that I had heard all this before it was too late . . ."

There was a wind coming up outside, and from somewhere up in the hills came the cry of a lonesome timber wolf. I glanced at my watch and was surprised to see it was already past midnight.

"What do you mean . . ." the girl started to ask, but she never completed the sentence.

Suddenly, Simon Ark was out of his chair, and he was pulling open the front door of the house. I ran to his side, and then I saw it, too . . .

A figure, or a thing, all in white, running with the wind toward the cliff where Death slept in the darkness . . .

WE FOLLOWED, through the night, with the gathering breeze whistling through the trees around us. The girl started to follow, but I waved her back inside. Whatever was out here, it was not for her to see . . .

In the distance, a sudden streak of lightning split the sky, and a rumble of thunder followed. It would be raining back in the hills, but with luck the storm would miss us.

The wind was picking up, though, and by the time we reached the edge of the cliff it was close to being a gale. I wondered briefly if a strong wind could have blown these people to their death, but that, of course, was fantastic . . . But perhaps the real reason for their death would be even more fantastic . . .

"There!" Simon Ark pointed down the cliff, to the very center of where the seventy-three bodies rested under canvas on the rocks.

And I saw it again.

The moon that had given us light before was hidden now by the threatening clouds of rain, but I could see the blot of white against the blackness of the rocks.

"Axidus?" I breathed.

"Or Satan himself," Simon Ark answered; "perhaps this is the moment I have waited for." He started down the rocks, and I followed.

But the white form seemed to sense our approach. Suddenly, before our very eyes, it seemed to fade away.

"He must be hiding in the rocks somewhere," I said.

The odor of the corpses was

all around us then, and my head swam sickeningly.

"I must find him," Simon Ark said, and he shouted something in a strange language that might have been Greek, but wasn't.

We searched the rocks until the odor was overpowering and forced us to retreat. We found nothing . . .

On the way back up the cliff, I asked Simon Ark what he'd shouted before.

"It was in Coptic," he said, "which is very much like Egyptian. It was a type of prayer . . ."

WITH THE coming of daylight, the horror that hung thick in the air over Gidaz seemed to lift a little. The girl had slept through the remainder of the night, and I had sat alone in the front room of the house while Simon Ark prowled the night on some further mysterious investigations.

Since I knew sleep was impossible, I spent the time attempting to set down in words just what had happened to me that day, ever since the moment in the early evening when I'd first arrived in Gidaz. But I couldn't do it; I was still living the thing, and the terror that clung to the village was still a very real part of the air I breathed. Maybe later . . .

Simon Ark returned to the house soon after daybreak, and the sound of our talking awak-

ened the girl. She made breakfast for us from among the remains we found around the house, and by nine o'clock, we were ready to leave.

The lack of sleep was beginning to get me then, but the sunlight helped revive me. Simon Ark looked the same as he had the evening before, and seemed anxious to leave the village. "I have things that must be done," he said. "In the meantime, if you would desire to help me, there are one or two things you could find out."

"Sure. Anything for a story."

They were interrupted then by the sound of an approaching truck. Down the single road that lead to civilization, an ancient mail truck was coming toward them.

"This must be the man who found the bodies yesterday," Simon Ark said.

And it was. A fairly tall, middle-aged man named Joe Harris. "They haven't buried them yet, huh?" he asked us.

"No," I answered. "The bodies are under canvas at the bottom of the cliff, a short distance from the rocks. The funeral is to take place today. I understand they've decided to bury them here in a mass grave rather than try to remove all the bodies to another town."

"Gee," he said, "I near died of shock yesterday morning when I drove up and found them all

down there. Why do you think they jumped?"

"I don't know," I said. "It would make a great story if I did."

THERE WERE other trucks and cars coming now, with a gleaming State Police car in the lead. There were workers with shovels, who would soon bury the remains of the Gidaz Horror. And there were more photographers and reporters, from all over the country, coming to record forever the strange happening in this forgotten village.

They took pictures of Joe Harris and his battered mail truck; they took pictures of Shelly Constance, and questioned her about her life in the village. She talked to them at length, but she did not mention the strange man, Axidus, again; I suspected that Simon Ark had suggested she keep silent about this part of it.

Simon Ark himself kept in the background during most of the morning, and went unnoticed in the crowd of curiosity seekers who poured over the scene in growing numbers throughout the early hours of the day.

It was nearly noon before Simon Ark and I could make our escape in my car. I wondered briefly how this strange man had arrived the previous night when he had no car, but the thought passed from my mind

as we watched them lowering the last of the seventy-three into the long grave at the base of the cliff.

For a moment, there was silence over the scene, as the last rites of various religions were spoken over the grave. Then, once again, a murmur of voice arose, as I turned my car away from the village.

Simon Ark was in the seat next to me, and I was glad I had managed to avoid the other reporters who'd ridden out to the village with me the previous day. For I had a feeling that the answer to this riddle rested somehow with Simon Ark, and with the white figure we'd seen on the cliff.

I turned into the highway that led north, toward the state capitol. "What did you want me to do?" I asked.

"Do? Oh, I would like you to look up some information in the old newspaper files. I would like you to find out if any priests or ministers have been killed in the Gidaz area within the past few years . . ."

I thought about that for a while. "All right, I'll get the information for you on one condition. That you tell me just who you are, and just who this Axidus is."

"I am just a man," he answered slowly. "A man from another age. You would not be interested in where I came from,

or in what my mission is. I need only tell you that I am searching for the ultimate evil — for Satan himself. And perhaps, in Gidaz, I have found him at last."

"I sighed softly. "What about Axidus?"

"Axidus is also from the past. I knew him long ago, in North Africa, as St. Augustine did..."

"Are you crazy? Are you trying to tell me we're dealing with people who've been dead over fifteen hundred years?"

"I do not know," Simon Ark replied. "But I intend to find out tonight, when we return to the village of the dead..."

I LEFT THE strange man near the capitol building an hour later, having agreed to meet him there again at five o'clock. It did not take me long to gather the information Simon Ark had requested, and I was surprised to learn that six months earlier, a Catholic priest had been found beaten to death only a few miles from Gidaz. The crime had never been solved, although police were still investigating...

I could make nothing of the information, but I was certain it would mean something to Simon Ark.

I went next to the public library, to do some investigating on my own. I was determined to solve the mystery of Axidus

and the seventy-three deaths, and I felt certain that the answer was hidden somewhere in the ancient pages of history.

I looked first in the Encyclopedia Britannica, but there was nothing under AXIDUS. I read the article on St. Augustine, but it contained no clue. A thick history book likewise offered no leads. A biographical dictionary listed no one named Axidus, and I was beginning to believe such a person had never existed.

I glanced out the library window, at the gleaming golden dome of the state capitol. Somewhere, there must be a clue... Axidus, St. Augustine... Augustine was a great Catholic saint, and a Catholic priest had been murdered near Gidaz six months ago...

I walked back to the endless book shelves that lined the walls and took down the index to the Catholic Encyclopedia...

A-X-I-D-U-S... Yes, there is was... "AXIDUS, leader of Circumcellions"... Quickly my fingers found the fifth volume and turned to the indicated page.

And I began to read: The Circumcellions were a branch of the Donatist schism, which had split away from the Catholic Church in the Fourth Century. They seemed to be an insane band of outlaws who roamed about North Africa, killing and robbing Catholic priests

and others. St. Augustine had spent much of his life fighting them, and their leader, Axidus.

The whole fantastic thing was beginning to take shape in my mind now . . . Axidus . . . the burned book . . . the murdered priest . . .

And then a sentence leaped out at me from the page: *"They frequently sought death, counting suicide as martyrdom. They were especially fond of flinging themselves from precipices . . . Even women caught the infection, and those who had sinned would cast themselves from the cliffs, to atone for their fault . . ."*

And further down the page was more: *"When in controversy with Catholics, the Donatist bishops were proud of their supporters. They declared that self-precipitation from a cliff had been forbidden in their councils. Yet the bodies of these suicides were sacrilegiously honoured, and crowds celebrated their anniversaries . . ."*

So this was it . . .

Something reaching out from fifteen hundred years ago to bring death to an entire village . . .

Was it possible?

Was it possible that this man Axidus had convinced seventy-three persons to leap to their deaths?

I left the library and stopped in a bar and fought off the gathering clouds of exhaustion and

horror with a couple of stiff drinks. Then I went to meet Simon Ark . . .

AS WE DROVE south once more, toward the dead village and the darkening night, I told Simon Ark what I had found. I told him about the murdered priest and about the Circumcellions.

"I feared that I was right," he said quietly. "The death of that priest proves that there actually existed in that village the ancient cult of the Circumcellions . . ."

"But . . . but the whole thing's fantastic. It couldn't happen in the Twentieth Century."

"Consider the circumstances, though. Here is a village almost completely cut off from the outside world. It is eighty miles from the nearest city, and almost that far from a town of any size. Its people are living completely within themselves, leaving Gidaz only about once a month. Except for the daily mail truck, they see no one else. The road leading to it is a dead end, so there are not even any other cars to pass by. The people, nearly all of them, are living in the past, in a time when the town was great and famous."

"Yes," I said, "I'm beginning to see . . ."

"And into this town comes a man, a man who is completely

evil, who sees the opportunity that the village and its people offer. This man, Axidus, plays on their ignorance and their superstition to get up a new religion. It is an area, I discovered this afternoon, largely neglected by the established churches because of its inaccessability. A priest will come by every six months or so, but the rest of the time the village is alone."

"And so they listened to Axidus."

"Yes . . . I imagine he had almost a hypnotic quality in his speech, a quality that, over a period of the last two years, convinced even the most hostile that he was their savior. A few, like Shelly Constance, who were young and intelligent enough to know the truth, simply left the village, rather than stay and fight this demon who had taken control. The priest who visited the place had to die, because he realized the truth. Perhaps others who opposed Axidus died, too. Because he was playing for big stakes and could not afford to lose."

"But . . . just how did he work the mass suicide?"

"In the same way that he, or his namesake, did fifteen hundred years ago. He convinced the people that suicide was a form of martyrdom, and that they should throw themselves from the cliff to repent for their

sins. He had probably been leading up to it for a long, long time. But two nights ago, when he called them suddenly from their houses, he told them the time had come. They had no time to think, to consider the fantastic thing they were doing. They actually believed, I am certain, that it was good. And they walked off of the cliff in the night, probably thinking that Axidus would join them. But of course he did not."

"You've built up a pretty strong case," I admitted. "I'll agree that over a period of years, a fanatic like that might talk most of those isolated people into killing themselves, especially since they seem to have had nothing to live for anyway. But there must have been at least one or two who would have resisted. What about the children?"

"I imagine," Simon Ark said quietly, "that the children were carried over the cliff in their mothers' arms. Or led over by their fathers."

I FELL SILENT as the horror of the scene formed a terrifying picture in my mind.

"And," he continued, "Axidus could easily have killed any adults who might have resisted the idea of suicide. He could have killed them and thrown their bodies down with the rest."

"Still, such a thing seems so . . . impossible."

"It seems so impossible and fantastic only because of its setting in time and space. In the Twentieth Century, in the western United States, it is fantastic. But in the Fourth Century, in North Africa, it was common. And who is to say that people have changed since then? Times have changed, and places have changed, but the people have remained the same, and they suffer today from exactly the same faults and weaknesses they had fifteen hundred years ago . . ."

I turned the car into the dirt road that led to the village of the dead. "But why are we coming back here tonight?"

"Because Axidus will return this evening, and this time he must not escape us."

"How do you know he'll return?"

"Because from the beginning Axidus had to be one of two things: either a clever killer whose insane mind had devised this fantastic scheme, or else he really was the long-dead Axidus of St. Augustine's time. If he is the former, then there's something in Gidaz he wants, possibly the gold, and he'll come for it because we scared him away last night. And," he paused a moment, "if it's to be the latter explanation, then according to legend and history, he'd re-

turn to worship at the grave, just as he did fifteen hundred years ago . . ."

I turned on my headlights against the thickening night and tried to shake the gathering sleep from my eyes. "Which do you think it is?"

"In a way, I hope it is the latter, because then possibly my long search will be over. But there is still one thing that puzzles me."

"What's that?"

"I am wondering why a mail truck was delivering mail this morning, to a village full of dead people . . ."

AFTER THAT we waited.

We waited in the rocks of the cliff itself, overlooking the grave in the moonlight. We waited as Augustine might have waited those many years before.

The evening slipped slowly by and nothing happened. Once there came the distant call of a timber wolf, and again the hooting of a nearby owl, but otherwise the night was silent.

The grave below us had been marked with a large temporary cross, until some sort of plaque could list the names of the seventy-three.

For a moment the moon slipped behind a cloud, but then it appeared again, and the edge of the cliff glowed in its light.

Then I saw it.

High above us, on the very

edge of the cliff, the girl stood . . .

"Damn!" I whispered. "I forgot about the girl; she's still here."

But before we could move, we realized she was not alone on the cliff's edge. A tall, bearded man, all in white, had come up behind her.

Simon Ark leaped from his hiding place and shouted one word: "Axidus!"

The figure on the cliff paused, startled, and the girl, seeing him behind her, screamed . . .

After that, it was a nightmare.

The figure in white was clutching the girl, like a scene from some third-rate movie, as I scrambled up the rocks toward them. But already Simon Ark was a head of me, shouting something in the language he'd used before.

Axidus released his grip on the girl, and I caught her as she fell.

And then, there on the very edge of the cliff, Simon Ark challenged this creature from another time. He held in his hand an oddly-shaped cross, with a loop at the top, and he said, in a voice like thunder, "Back, Axidus, go back to the caverns of the damned from which you came." He raised the cross high above his head. "I command it, in the name of Augustinel"

And suddenly the figure in

white seemed to lose his footing on the rocks, and he slipped down over the edge of the cliff, with a scream that echoed through the night . . .

WE FOUND him later, at the base of the cliff, which had now claimed its seventy-fourth life. And of course, under the blood and the false white beard, we found Joe Harris, the mail truck driver . . .

And one can argue, I suppose, that it all had a perfectly sane explanation. As driver of the mail truck, the insane Joe Harris would have known enough about the people to scare them into believing he was a man of supernatural powers. He had been after the remains of the gold in the old mines, and had carefully planned for two years to drive the entire town to suicide.

But of course, this did not explain how a man like Joe Harris had ever heard the odd story of Axidus in the first place, nor did it explain why he found it necessary to burn the books of Saint Augustine.

That was why I never published my story. There were too many things that could never be explained. Simon Ark and I worked the rest of the night, burying Joe Harris in the big grave with the other seventy-three. His disappearance caused some further excitement,

but in a few weeks it was forgotten.

And likewise the *Gidaz Horror* itself has been forgotten with the passage of time. except for an occasional feature article in the *Sunday newspapers*.

Perhaps it is better that way . . .

As for the others who shared my adventure, the girl Shelly Constance and I were married six months later, but that is another story, and a much happier one.

And Simon Ark . . . Well, I have not seen him since that night, but I have the feeling that he's still around somewhere . . .

For a different approach to a well known theme, we recommend *The Faceless Thing*, by Edward D. Hoch, which appeared in the November 1963 issue of our companion magazine, *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*.

It's about a man who has carried a terrible secret with him all his life — the truth about what happened to his sister when they were exploring a cave, during childhood. He never told anyone of the thing in the cave — but now that his life is drawing to a close, he feels that he must go back and confront it.

Was it all his imagination — or did he really see what he has been sure all his life he saw? And what will happen if he was right? . . . You can still get copies of this issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* from Health Knowledge, Inc., 119 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10003 at 50c per copy postpaid.

House of The Hatchet

by Robert Bloch

DAISY AND I were enjoying one of our usual quarrels. It started over the insurance policy this time, but after we threshed that out we went into the regular routine. Both of us had our cues down perfectly.

"Why don't you go out and get a job like other men instead of sitting around the house pounding a typewriter all day?"

"You knew I was a writer when I married you. If you were so hot to hitch up with a professional man you ought to have married that brokendown interne you ran around with. You'd know where he was all day; out practising surgery by dissecting hamburgers in that Chili parlor down the street."

"Oh you needn't be so sar-

Behind the legend of a haunted house lurks
a tangible, evil presence.

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castic. At least George would do his best to be a good provider."

"I'll say he would. He provided me with a lot of laughs ever since I met him."

"That's the trouble with you — you and your superior attitude. Think you're better than anybody else. Here we are, practically starving, and you have to pay installments on a new car just to show it off to your movie friends. And on top of that you go and take out a big policy on me just to be able to brag about how you're 'protecting' your family. I wish I *had* married George — at least he'd bring home some of that hamburger to eat when he finished work. What do you expect me to live on, used carbon paper and old typewriter ribbons?"

"Well, how the devil can I help it if the stuff doesn't sell? I figured on that contract deal but it fell through. You're the one that's always beefing about money — who do you think I am, the goose that laid the golden egg?"

"You've been laying plenty of eggs with those last stories you sent out."

"Funny, Very funny, But I'm getting just a little tired of your second-act dialogue, Daisy."

"So I've noticed. You'd like to change partners and dance, I suppose. Perhaps you'd rather exchange a little sparkling rep-

artee with that Jeanne Corey. Oh, I've noticed the way you hung around her that night over at Ed's place. You couldn't have got much closer without turning into a corset."

"Now listen, you leave Jeanne's name out of this."

"Oh, I'm supposed to leave Jeanne's name out of it, eh? Your wife mustn't take the name of your girl-friend in vain. Well, darling, I always knew you were a swift worker, but I didn't think it had gone that far. Have you told her that she's your inspiration yet?"

"Damn it, Daisy, why must you go twisting around everything I say . . ."

"Why don't you insure her, too? Bigamy insurance — you could probably get a policy issued by Brigham Young."

"Oh, turn it off, will you? A fine act to headline our anniversary, I must say."

"Anniversary?"

"Today's May 18th, isn't it?"

"May 18th . . ."

"Yeah. Here, shrew."

"Why — honey, it's a necklace . . ."

"Yeah. Just a little dividend on the bonds of matrimony."

"Honey — you bought this for me? — with all our bills and . . ."

"Never mind that. And quit gasping in my ear, will you? You sound like little Eva before they hoist her up with the ropes."

"Darling, it's so beautiful. Here."

"Aw, Daisy. Now see what you've done. Made me forget where we left off quarreling. Oh, well."

"Our anniversary. And to think I forgot!"

"Well, I didn't. Daisy."

"Yes?"

"I've been thinking — that is, well, I'm just a sentimental cuss at heart, and I was sort of wondering if you'd like to hop in the car and take run out along the Prentiss Road."

"You mean like the day we — eloped?"

"Um hum."

"Of course, darling. I'd love to. Oh, honey, where *did* you get this necklace?"

THAT'S HOW it was. Just one of those things. Daisy and I, holding our daily sparring match. Usually it kept us in trim. Today, though, I began to get the feeling that we had over-trained. We'd quarreled that way for months, on and off. I don't know why; I wouldn't be able to define "incompatibility" if I saw it on my divorce-papers. I was broke, and Daisy was a shrew. Let it go at that.

But I felt pretty clever when I dragged out my violin for the *Hearts and Flowers*. Anniversary, necklace, re-tracing the honeymoon route; it all added up. I'd found a way to keep

Daisy quiet without stuffing a mop into her mouth.

She was sentimentally happy and I was self-congratulatory as we climbed into the car and headed up Wilshire towards Prentiss Road. We still had a lot to say to each other, but in repetition it would be merely nauseating. When Daisy felt good she went in for baby-talk — which struck me as being about as much in character as Boris Karloff playing the part of Casper Milquetoast.

But for a while we were both happy. I began to kid myself that it was just like old times; we really were the same two kids running away on our crazy elopement. Daisy had just "gotten off" from the beauty parlor and I'd just sold my script series to the agency, and we were running down to Valos to get married. It was the same spring weather, the same road, and Daisy snuggled close to me in the same old way.

But it wasn't the same. Daisy wasn't a kid any more; there were no lines in her face, but there was a rasp in her voice. She hadn't taken on any weight, but she'd taken on a load of querulous ideas. I was different, too. Those first few radio sales had set the pace; I began to run around with the big-shots, and that costs money. Only lately I hadn't made any sales, and the damned expenses kept piling

up, and every time I tried to get any work done at the house there was Daisy nagging away. Why did we have to buy a new car? Why did we have to pay so much rent? Why such an insurance policy? Why did I buy three suits?

So I buy her a necklace and she shuts up. There's a woman's logic for you.

Oh well, I figured, today I'll forget it. Forget the bills, forget her nagging, forget Jeanne — though that last was going to be hard. Jeanne was quiet, and she had a private income, and she thought baby-talk was silly. Oh well.

We drove on to Prentiss Road and took the old familiar route. I stopped my little stream-of-consciousness act and tried to get into the mood. Daisy *was* happy; no doubt of that. We'd packed an overnight bag, and without mentioning it we both knew we'd stay at the hotel in Valos, just as we had three years ago when we were married.

Three years of drab, nagging monotony . . .

But I wasn't going to think about that. Better to think about Daisy's pretty blonde curls gleaming in the afternoon sunshine; to think about the pretty green hills doing ditto in the afternoon ditto. It was spring, the spring of three years ago, and all life lay before us — down the white concrete road that

curved across the hills to strange heights of achievement beyond.

So we drove on, blithely enough. She pointed out the signs and I nodded or grunted or said "Uh-uh" and the first thing I knew we were four hours on the road and it was getting past afternoon and I wanted to get out and stretch my legs and besides . . .

THERE IT LAY. I couldn't have missed the banner. And even if I had, there was Daisy, squealing in my ear, "Oh, honey — look."

CAN YOU TAKE IT? THE HOUSE OF TERROR VISIT A GENUINE, AUTHENTIC HAUNTED HOUSE

And in smaller lettering, beneath, further enticements were listed.

See the Kluva Mansion! Visit the Haunted Chamber — see the Axe used by the Mad Killer! DO THE DEAD RETURN? Visit the HOUSE OF TERROR — only genuine attraction of its kind. ADMISSION — 25c.

Of course I didn't read all this while slashing by at 60 m.p.h. We pulled up as Daisy tugged my shoulder, and while she read, I looked at the large, rambling frame building. It looked like dozens of others we passed on the road; houses occupied by "swamis" and "mediums" and

"Yogi Psychologists". For this was the lunatic fringe where the quacks fed on the tourist trade. But here was a fellow with a little novelty; he had something a bit different. That's what I thought.

But Daisy evidently thought a lot more. "Ooh, honey, let's go in."

"What?"

"I'm so stiff from all this driving, and besides, maybe they sell hot dogs inside or something and I'm hungry."

Well. That was Daisy. Daisy the sadist. Daisy the horror-movie fan. She didn't fool me for a minute. I knew all about my wife's pretty little tastes. She was a thrill-addict. Shortly after our marriage she'd let down the bars and started reading the more lurid murder trial news aloud to me at breakfast. She began to leave ghastly magazines around the house. Pretty soon she was dragging me to all the mystery-pictures. Just another one of her annoying habits — I could close my eyes at any time and conjure up the drone of her voice, tense with latent excitement, as she read about the Cleveland torso slayings, or the latest hatchet-killing.

Evidently nothing was too synthetic for her tastes. Here was an old shack that in its palmiest days was no better

than a tenement house for goats; a dump with a lurid side-show banner flung in front of the porch — and still she had to go in. "Haunted House" got her going. Maybe that's what had happened to our marriage. I would have pleased her better by going around the house in a black mask, purring like Bela Lugosi with bronchitis, and caressing her with a hatchet.

I ATTEMPTED to convey some of the pathos of my thoughts in the way I replied, "What the blazes?" but it was a losing battle. Daisy had her hand on the car door. There was a smile on her face — a smile that did queer things to her lips. I used to see that smile when she read the murder-news; it reminded me, unpleasantly, of a hungry cat's expression while creeping up on a robin. She was a shrew and she was a sadist.

But what of it? This was a second honeymoon; no time to spoil things just when I'd fixed matters up. Kill half an hour here and then on to the hotel in Valos.

"Come on!"

I jerked out of my musings to find Daisy halfway up the porch. I locked the car, pocketed the keys, joined her before the dingy door. It was getting misty in the late afternoon and the clouds rolled over the sun. Daisy knocked impatiently. The door

opened slowly, after a long pause in the best haunted-house tradition. This was the cue for a sinister face to poke itself out and emit a greasy chuckle. Daisy was just itching for that, I knew.

Instead she got W. C. Fields.

Well, not quite. The proboscis was smaller, and not so red. The cheeks were thinner, too; but the checked suit, the squint, the jowls, and above all that "step right up gentlemen" voice were all in the tradition.

"Ah. Come in, come in. Welcome to Kluva Mansion, my friends, welcome." The cigar fingered us forward. "Twenty-five cents, please. Thank you."

There we were in the dark hallway. It really was dark, and there certainly was a musty enough odor, but I knew damned well the house wasn't haunted by anything but cockroaches. Our comic friend would have to do some pretty loud talking to convince me; but then, this was Daisy's show.

"It's a little late, but I guess I've got time to show you around. Just took a party through about fifteen minutes ago — big party from San Diego. They drove all the way up just to see the Kluva Mansion, so I can assure you you're getting your money's worth."

All right, buddy, cut out the assuring, and let's get this over with. Trot out your zombies, give Daisy a good shock with an elec-

tric battery or something, and we'll get out of here.

"Just what is this haunted house and how did you happen to come by it?" asked Daisy. One of those original questions she was always thinking up. She was brilliant like that all the time. Just full of surprises.

"Well, it's like this, lady. Lots of folks ask me that and I'm only too glad to tell them. This house was built by Ivan Kluva — don't know if you remember him or not — Russian movie director, came over here about '23 in the old silent days, right after De-Mille began to get popular with his spectacle pictures. Kluva was an 'epic' man; had quite a European reputation, so they gave him a contract. He put up this place, lived here with his wife. Aren't many folks left in the movie colony that remember old Ivan Kluva; he never really got to direct anything either.

"First thing he did was to mix himself up with a lot of foreign cults. This was way back, remember; Hollywood had some queer birds then. Prohibition, and a lot of wild parties; dope addicts, all kinds of scandals, and some stuff that never did get out. There was a bunch of devil-worshippers and mystics, too — not like these fakes down the road; genuine article. Kluva got in with them.

"I guess he was a little crazy, or got that way. Because one

night, after some kind of gathering here, he murdered his wife. In the upstairs room, on a kind of an altar he rigged up. He just took a hatchet to her and hacked off her head. Then he disappeared. The police looked in a couple of days later; they found her, of course, but they never did locate Kluva.

"Maybe he jumped off the cliffs behind the house. Maybe — I've heard stories — he killed her as a sort of sacrifice so he could go away. Some of the cult members were grilled, and they had a lot of wild stories about worshipping things or beings that granted boons to those who gave them human sacrifices; such boons as going away from Earth. Oh, it was crazy enough, I guess, but the police did find a damned funny statue behind the altar that they didn't like and never showed around, and they burned a lot of books and things they got hold of here. Also they chased that cult out of California."

All this corny chatter rolled out in a drone and I winced. Now I'm only a two-bit gag-writer, myself, but I was thinking that if I went in for such things I could improvise a better story than this poorly-told yarn and I could ad-lib it more effectively than this bird seemed able to do with daily practice. It sounded so stale, so flat, so

unconvincing. The rottenest "thriller plot" in the world.

Or . . .

IT STRUCK me then: Perhaps the story was true; maybe this *was* the solution. After all, there were no supernatural elements yet. Just a dizzy Russian devil-worshipper murdering his wife with a hatchet. It happens once in a while; psychopathology is full of such records. And why not? Our comic friend merely bought the house after the murder, cooked up his "haunt" yarn, and capitalized.

Evidently my guess was correct, because old bugle-beak sounded off again.

"And so, my friends, the deserted Kluva Mansion remained, alone and untenanted. Not utterly untenanted, though. There was the ghost. Yes, the ghost of Mrs. Kluva — the Lady in White."

Phooey! Always it has to be the Lady in White. Why not in pink, for a change, or green? Lady in White — sounds like a burlesque headliner, and so did our spieler. He was trying to push his voice down into his fat stomach and make it impressive.

"Every night she walks the upper corridor to the murder chamber. Her slit throat shines in the moonlight as she lays her head once again on the blood-stained block, again receives the

fatal blow, and with a groan of torment, disappears into thin air."

Hot air, you mean, buddy.

"Oooh," said Daisy. "She would."

"I'd say the house was deserted for years. But there were tramps, vagrants, who broke in from time to time to stay the night. They stayed the night — and longer. Because in the morning they were always found — on the murder block, with their throats chopped by the murder axe."

I wanted to say "Axe-ually?" but then, I have my better side. Daisy was enjoying this so; her tongue was almost hanging out.

"After a while nobody would come here; even the tramps shunned the spot. The real estate people couldn't sell it. Then I rented. I knew the story would attract visitors, and frankly, I'm a business man."

Thanks for telling me, brother. I thought you were a fake.

"And now, you'd like to see the murder chamber? Just follow me, please. Up the stairs, right this way. I've kept everything just as it always was, and I'm sure you'll be more than interested in—"

Daisy pinched me on the dark stairway. "Ooh, sugar, aren't you thrilled?"

I don't like to be called "sugar." And the idea of Daisy actually finding something "thrill-

ing" in this utterly ridiculous farce was almost nauseating. For a moment I could have murdered her myself; maybe Kluva had something there at that.

THE STAIRS creaked, and the dusty windows allowed a sepulchral light to creep across the mouldy floor as we followed the waddling showman down the black hallway. A wind seemed to have sprung up outside, and the house shook before it, groaning in torment.

Daisy giggled nervously. In the movie-show she always twisted my lapel-buttons off when the monster came into the room where the girl was sleeping. She was like that now — hysterical.

I felt as excited as a stuffed herring in a pawnshop.

W. C. opened a door down the hall and fumbled around inside. A moment later he reappeared carrying a candle and beckoned us to enter the room. Well, that was a little better; showed some imagination, anyway. The candle was effective in the gathering darkness; it cast blotches of shadow over the walls and caused shapes to creep in the corners.

"Here we are," he almost whispered.

And there we were.

Now I'm not psychic; I'm not even highly imaginative. But when I entered that room I *knew* that it, at least, wasn't a

fake. The air reeked of murder. The shadows ruled over a domain of death. It was cold in here, cold as a charnel-house; and the candlelight fell on the great bed in the corner, then moved to the center of the room and covered a monstrous bulk. The murder block.

It *was* something like an altar, at that. There was a niche in the wall behind it, and I could almost imagine a statue being placed there. What kind of a statue? A black bat, inverted and crucified? Devil-worshippers used that, didn't they? Or was it another and more horrible kind of idol? The police had destroyed it; but the block was still there, and in the candlelight I saw the stains. They trickled over the rough sides.

Daisy moved closer to me and I could feel her tremble.

Kluva's chamber. A man with an axe, holding a terrified woman across the block; the strength of inspired madness in his eyes, and in his hands, an axe . . .

"It was here, on the night of January twelfth, nineteen twenty-four, that Ivan Kluva murdered his wife with . . ."

The fat man stood by the door, chanting out his listless refrain; for some reason I listened to every word. Here in this room, those words were real. They weren't scareheads on a sideshow banner; here in the darkness they had meaning. A

man and his wife, and murder. Death is just a word you read in the newspaper, but some day it becomes real; dreadfully real. Something the worms whisper in your ears as they chew. Murder is a word, too. It is the power of death, and sometimes there are men who exercise that power, like gods. Men who kill are like gods. They take away life. There is something cosmically obscene about the thought. A shot fired in drunken frenzy; a blow struck in anger; a bayonet plunged in the madness of war; an accident; a car-crash — these things are part of life. But a man, any man, who lives with the thought of Death; who thinks and plans a deliberate, cold-blooded murder . . .

To sit there at the supper table, looking at his wife, and saying, "Twelve o'clock. You have five more hours to live, my dear. Five more hours. Nobody knows that. Your friends don't know it. Even you don't know it. No one knows — except myself. Myself, and Death. I am Death. Yes. I am Death to you. I shall numb your body and your brain, I shall be your lord and master. You were born, you have lived, only for this single supreme moment; that I shall command your fate. You exist only that I may kill you."

Yes, it was obscene. And then, this block, and a hatchet.

"Come upstairs, dear." And

his thoughts, grinning behind the words. Up the dark stairs to the dark room, where the block and hatchet waited.

I wondered if he hated her. No, I suppose not. If the story was true, he had sacrificed her for a purpose. She was just the most handy, the most convenient person to sacrifice. He must have had blood like the water under the polar peaks.

IT WAS the room that did it, not the story. I could feel him in the room, and I could feel *her*.

Yes, that was funny. Now I could feel *her*. Not as a being, not as a tangible presence, but as a force. A restless force. Something that stirred in back of me before I turned my head. Something hiding in the deeper shadows; something in the blood-stained block. A chained spirit.

"Here I died. I ended here. One minute I was alive, unsuspecting. The next found me gripped by the ultimate horror of Death. The hatchet came down across my throat, so full of life, and sliced it out. Now I wait. I wait for others, for there is nothing left to me but revenge. I am not a person any longer, nor a spirit. I am merely a force — a force created as I felt my life slip away from my throat. For at that moment I knew but one feeling with my entire dying being; a feeling of

utter, cosmic hatred. Hatred at the sudden injustice of what had happened to me. The force was born then when I died; it is all that is left of me. Hatred. Now I wait, and sometimes I have a chance to let the hatred escape. By killing another I can feel the hatred rise, wax, grow strong. Then for a brief moment I rise, wax, grow strong; feel real again, touch the hem of life's robe, which once I wore. Only by surrendering to my dark hate can I survive in death. And so I lurk; lurk here in this room. Stay too long and I shall return. Then, in the darkness, I seek your throat and the blade bites and I taste again the ecstasy of reality."

The old drizzle-puss was elaborating his story, but I couldn't hear him for my thoughts. Then all at once he flashed something out across my line of vision; something that was like a stark shadow against the candlelight.

It was a hatchet.

I felt, rather than heard, when Daisy went "Ooooh!" beside me. Looking down I stared into two blue mirrors of terror that were her eyes. I had thought plenty, and what her imaginings had been I could guess. The old bird was stolid enough, but he brandished that hatchet, that hatchet with the rusty blade, and it got so I couldn't look at anything else but the jagged edge of the hatchet. I couldn't hear or see

or think anything; there was that hatchet, the symbol of Death. There was the real crux of the story; not in the man or the woman, but in that tiny razor-edge line. That razor-edge was really Death. That razor-edge spelled doom to all living things. Nothing in the world was greater than that razor-edge; no brain, no power, no love, no hate could withstand it.

And it swooped out in the man's hands and I tore my eyes away and looked at Daisy, at anything, just to keep the black thought down. And I saw Daisy, her face that of a tortured Medusa.

Then she slumped.

I caught her. Bugle-beak looked up with genuine surprise.

"My wife's fainted," I said.

He just blinked. Didn't know what the score was, at first. And a minute later I could swear he was just a little bit pleased. He thought his story had done it, I suppose.

Well, this changed all plans. No Valos, no drive before supper.

"Any place around here where she can lie down?" I asked. "No, not in this room."

"My wife's bedroom is down the hall," said Bugle-beak.

His wife's bedroom, eh? But no one stayed here after dark, he had said — the damned old fake!

This was no time for quibbling. I carried Daisy into the room down the hall, chafed her wrists.

"Shall I send my wife up to take care of her?" asked the now solicitous showman.

"No, don't bother. Let me handle her; she gets these things every so often — hysteria, you know. But she'll have to rest a while."

He shuffled down the hall, and I sat there cursing. Damn the woman, it was just like her! But too late to alter circumstances now. And at least she had her mouth shut. I decided to let her sleep it off.

I went downstairs in the darkness, groping my way. And I was only halfway down when I heard a familiar pattering strike the roof. Sure enough — a typical West Coast heavy dew was falling. Fine thing, too; dark as pitch outside.

Well, there was the set-up. Splendid melodrama background. I'd been dragged to movies for years and it was always the same as this.

The young couple caught in a haunted house by a thunderstorm. The mysterious evil caretaker. (Well, maybe he wasn't, but he'd have to do until a better one came along.) The haunted room. The fainting girl, asleep and helpless in the bedroom. Enter Boris Karloff dressed in three pounds of nose-

putty. "Grrrrr!" says Boris. "Eeeeeeeh!" says the girl. "What's that?" shouts Inspector Tooze-fuddy from downstairs. And then a mad chase. "Bang! Bang!" And Boris Karloff falls down into an open manhole. Girl gets frightened. Boy gets girl. Formula.

I thought I was pretty clever when I turned on the burlesque thought pattern, but when I got down to the foot of the stairs I knew that I was playing hide-and-go-seek with my thoughts. Something dark and cold was creeping around in my brain, and I was trying hard to avoid it. Something to do with Iven Kluva and his wife and the haunted room and the hatchet. Suppose there *was* a ghost and Daisy was lying up there alone and . . .

"HAM AND eggs?"

What the . . . I turned around. There was Bugle-beak at the foot of the stairs.

"I said, would you care for some ham and eggs? Looks pretty bad outside and so long as the Missus is resting I thought maybe you'd like to join the wife and me in a little supper."

I could have kissed him, nose and all.

We went into the back. Mrs. was just what you'd expect; thin woman in her middle forties, wearing a patient look. The

place was cosy, though; she had fixed up several rooms as living quarters. I began to have a little more respect for Bugle-beak. Poor showman though he was, he seemed to be making a living in a rather novel way. And his wife was an excellent cook.

The rain thundered down. Something about a little lighted room in the middle of a storm that makes you feel good inside. Confidential. Mrs. Keenan — Bugle-beak introduced himself as Homer Keenan — suggested that I might take a little brandy up to Daisy. I demurred, but Keenan perked up his ears — and nose — at the mention of brandy and suggested we have a little. The *little* proved to be a half-gallon jug of fair peach-brandy, and we filled our glasses. As the meal progressed we filled them again. And again. The liquor helped to chase that dark thought away, or almost away. But it still bothered me, so I got Homer Keenan into talking. Better a boring conversation than a boring thought — boring little black beetle of thought, chewing away in your brain.

"So after the carny folded I got out from under. Put over a little deal in Tia and cleaned up but the missus kind of wanted to settle down. Tent business in this country all shot to blazes anyway. Well, I knew

this Feingerber from the old days, like I say — and he put me up to this house. Yeah, sure, that *was* an Ivan Kluva and he *did* kill his wife here. Block and axe genuine too; I got a state permit to keep 'em. Museum, this is. But the ghost story, of course, that's just a fake. Gets them in, though. Some week-ends we play to capacity crowds ten hours a day. Makes a nice thing of it. We live here — say, let's have another nip of this brandy, whaddya say? Come on, it won't hurt you. Get it from a Mex down the road a ways."

Fire. Fire in the blood. What did he mean the ghost story was fake? When I went into that room I smelled murder. I thought *his* thoughts. And then I had thought *hers*. Her hate was in that room; and if it wasn't a ghost, what was it? Somehow it all tied in with that black thought I had buzzing in my head; that damned black thought all mixed up with the axe and hate, and poor Daisy lying up there helpless. Fire in my head. Brandy fire. But not enough. I could still think of Daisy, and all at once something blind gripped me and I was afraid and I trembled all over, and I couldn't wait. Thinking of her like that, all alone in the storm, near the murder-room and the block and the hatchet — I knew I must go to

her. I couldn't stand the horrid suspicion.

I got up like a fool, mumbled something about looking after her, and ran up the black staircase. I was trembling, trembling, until I reached her bedside and saw how peacefully she lay there. Her sleep was quite untroubled. She was even smiling. She didn't know. She wasn't afraid of ghosts and hatchets. Looking at her I felt utterly ridiculous, but I did stare down at her for a long time until I regained control of myself once again . . .

When I went downstairs the liquor had hit me and I felt drunk. The thought was gone from my brain now, and I was beginning to experience relief.

Keenan had refilled my glass for me, and when I gulped it down he followed suit and immediately poured again. This time we sat down to a real gabfest.

I began to talk. I felt like an unwinding top. Everything began to spin out of my throat. I told about my life; my "career", such as it was; my romance with Daisy, even. Just felt like it. The liquor.

Before you know it I was pulling a True Confession of my own, with all the trimmings. How things stood with Daisy and me. Our foolish quarrels. Her nagging. Her touchiness

about things like our car, and the insurance, and Jeanne Corey. I was maudlin enough to be petty. I picked on her habits. Then I began to talk about this trip of ours, and my plans for a second honeymoon, and it was only instinct that shut me up before becoming actually disgusting.

Keenan adopted an older "man-of-the-world" attitude, but he finally broke down enough to mention a few of his wife's salient deficiencies. What I told him about Daisy's love for the horrors prompted him to tease his wife concerning her own timidity. It developed that while she knew the story was a fake, she still shied away from venturing upstairs after nightfall — just as though the ghost were real.

Mrs. Keenan bridled. She denied everything. Why she'd go upstairs any time at all. Any time at all.

"How about now? It's almost midnight. Why not go up and take a cup of coffee to that poor sick woman?" Keenan sounded like somebody advising Little Red Riding Hood to go see her grandmother.

"Don't bother," I assured him. "The rain's dying down. I'll go our way. We've got to get to up and get her and we'll be on Valos, you know."

"Think I'm afraid, eh?" Mrs.

Keenan was already doing things with the coffee pot. Rather dizzily, but she managed.

"No, no — but really —"

"You men, always talking about your wives. I'll show you!" She took the cup, then arched her back eloquently as she passed Keenan and disappeared in the hallway.

I GOT an urge. Sobriety rushed to my head. "Keenan," I whispered.

"Whazzat?"

"Keenan, we must stop her!"

"What for?"

"You ever gone upstairs at night?"

"Course not. Why sh'd I? All dusty up there, mus' keep it tha'way for cust'mers. Never go up."

"Then how do you know that the story isn't true?" I talked fast. Very.

"What?"

"I say perhaps there *is* a ghost."

"Aw, go on!"

"Keenan, I tell you I felt something up there. You're so used to the place you didn't notice, but I *felt* it. A woman's hate, Keenan. A woman's hate!" I was almost screaming. I dragged him from his chair and tried to push him into the hall. I had to stop her, somehow; I was afraid.

"That room is filled with menace." Quickly I explained my thoughts of the afternoon

concerning the dead woman — surprised and slain, so that she died only with a great hate forming as life left her; a hate that endured, that thrived on death alone. A hate, embodied, that would take up the murder hatchet and slay . . .

"Stop your wife, Keenan," I screamed. "Stop her!"

"What about *your* wife?" chuckled the showman.. "Besides," and he leered, drunkenly, "I'll tell you somethin' I wasn't gonna tell. It's *all* a fake." He wheezed. "Not only ghost part. But — there never was a Ivan Kluva, never was no wife. Never was no killing. Jus' old butcher's block. Hatchet's my hatchet. No murder, no ghost, nothin' to be afraid of. Good joke, make myself hones' dollar. All a fake!"

"Come on!" I screamed, and the black thought came back and it sang in my brain and I tried to drag him up the stairs, knowing it was too late, but still I had to do something . . .

And then *she* screamed.

I heard it. She was running out of the room, down the hall. And at the head of the stairs she screamed again, but the scream turned into a gurgle. It was black up there, but out of the blackness tottered her silhouette. Down the stairs she rolled; bump, bump, bump. Same sound as a rubber ball. But she was a woman, and she

ended up at the bottom of the stairs with the axe still stuck in her throat.

Right there I should have turned and run, but that thing inside my head wouldn't let me. I just stood there as Keenan looked down at the body of his wife, and I babbled it all out again.

"I hated her — you don't understand how those little things count — and Jeanne waiting — there was the insurance — if I did it at Valos no one would ever know — here was accident, but better."

"There is no ghost," Keenan mumbled. He didn't even hear me. "There is no ghost." I stared at the slashed throat.

"When I saw the hatchet and she fainted, it came over me. I could get you drunk, carry her out, and you'd never know . . ."

"What killed her?" he whispered. "There is no ghost."

I thought again of my theory of a woman's hate surviving death and existing thereafter only with an urge to slay. I thought of that hate, embodied, grabbing up a hatchet and slaying, saw Mrs. Keenan fall, then glanced up at the darkness of the hall as the grinning song in my brain rose, forcing me to speak.

"There *is* a ghost now," I whispered. "You see, the second time I went up to see Daisy I killed her with this hatchet."

The Off - Season

by Gerald W. Page

JASON FIDLER'S Seaside Hotel stayed open all year long only because he lived there himself and had since bought the place three years ago. Two weeks after the season ended, he would have to discharge all his help with the hope he could hire them back again next year. During the off-season he could only afford to keep Mrs. Simms, who ran the kitchen and did some book-

keeping. Occasionally, when he had a guest he would hire some girl from the village as a part-time maid, and on those occasions when repair work could not wisely be put off longer, he would have Mr. Otis, the village handy man come out. During the off-season months guests were rare, and almost never stayed more than three or four days.

So it was that when Judith

Every sixth year the ceremony was performed
and another unsolved murder added to the list.

Grant came to spend two weeks at the Hotel, Jason was not only pleased — he was the one who carried her luggage up to her room. As he stood just inside the door, while she looked around the room, Jason was acutely aware of how old-fashioned and rather shabby the room really was. It had the sort of outworn elegance that seems to go with yellowed lace curtains and fading wall-paper; with large four-poster beds and heavy hand-carved wooden furniture. With some embarrassment he realized that she would probably prefer a more modern room.

"I guess this isn't our best room," he said apologetically. "I'm afraid we couldn't have another one ready before tomorrow afternoon, but . . ."

She crossed the room and stared out the window. "I wouldn't think of another room. I can see the beach from here and the ocean." She turned and faced him, smiling. "I'll get the breeze from the ocean every morning and besides, the room has such a cozy old-fashioned feeling to it. I love the room, Mr. Fidler. I wouldn't think of changing."

Normally, the only room really ready for guests would be one of the better ones, but Judith was the hotel's second guest in less than a week — and both had stated a desire

to stay on for at least two weeks. It was unusual good fortune and, as Jason hurried downstairs to see how Mrs. Simms was coming with dinner, he actually whistled to himself.

It was almost seven, and dinner was coming along fine. Jason wisely avoided the kitchen, once he was assured of that. Mr. Roberts would be down soon — he was a very punctual man, even if Jason didn't feel completely at ease around him. Jason frequently felt ill-at-ease around strangers, but Mr. Roberts was a special case; there was something decidedly antagonistic about him. He spent most of his time in his room, or else on the hotel veranda, always working on that book of his. His first two days he had spent in the village asking questions, but Jason had learned long ago that you had to live among these people a while before they would answer questions.

The really odd thing about Roberts was that the book he was working on somehow seemed secondary to his real reason for staying on. Jason could not pinpoint his reasons for believing so, but he was certain that Roberts was waiting for something.

Judith Grant was the first one down, shortly before seven. She wore a light, fresh-looking white dress that contrasted su-

perbly with her smoothly-tanned complexion. Her black hair was long and her face had a fresh-scrubbed radiance about it. She seem hardly old enough to be out of high school.

Jason showed her into the dining room and to the large table that was the only one used during the off-season. After helping her with her chair (with a polite, "Thank you," and a flash of even white teeth as reward) Jason went to check on Mrs. Simms, who was coming along just fine, thank you. And when Jason returned to the dining room, there was Mr. Roberts,, seated opposite Judith.

As usual, Roberts was dressed in casual but expensive and impeccably pressed clothes, shaven and well-groomed, his thin mustache making his overhandsome features seem somehow sinister. Both guests looked at Jason as he entered the room and he hastened embarrassedly with introductions, ending with a flustered mention of Mr. Roberts' book.

"How fascinating," Judith said. "What are you writing about?"

Roberts allowed himself a slow smile. "Murder, Miss Grant."

"Call me Judith," she said. "You know, I guess it's morbid of me, but I always enjoy reading a good murder story."

"This is factual," Roberts said. "The crimes happened around here — down on the beach, as a matter of fact. In all, there were twelve that we know of and most unusual crimes they were. The last was committed about six years ago. Not quite six, but I think the anniversary should be coming close."

That was the moment when Mrs. Simms chose to make her entrance with a steaming platter of chicken. The next few moments were concerned with serving and passing food and when conversation resumed, it dealt with more prosaic subjects than murder.

THE NEXT MORNING Jason, as always, arose early. It was Wednesday and the day was clear and warmer than was normal for this time of the year. He went out to the veranda to sweep it off before breakfast. This was a custom with him; because the hotel was so close to the sea, sand was a problem. The lobby was hard enough to keep clean but the veranda, with its wooden board flooring was a special problem. Jason made a little ceremony of his regular sweeping of the veranda and he enjoyed it. Just as he finished sweeping, he looked up and saw Judith returning from the sea.

She wore a short beach jacket and her long, shapely tanned legs were bare. Her hair had the tangled look that hair has after wearing a swimming cap and the cap itself was carried in her left hand. She looked more like a high school girl than she had even looked before. She was smiling and waving her right hand.

"It's a little early to be swimming," Jason said in conversation as she came up the veranda steps.

"It's never too early. When I woke up the sun was just rising over the sea and I just couldn't resist it. The sea's wonderful, Mr. Fidler. I love the sea."

"It appears to be a fine ton-is," Roberts' voice said, from behind Jason. He was standing in the doorway, regarding Judith with frank admiration.

"Good morning Philip," Judith said. "Getting an early start on your current chapter?"

"Now how can I keep my mind on my work with distractions like you around?"

Her smile deepened in acknowledgement of the flattery. She turned to Jason and asked, "What time is breakfast, Mr. Fidler?"

"It should be ready in about fifteen minutes."

"I'll just have time to change," she said and ran inside.

After breakfast, Judith went

into the village, 'to look around'. Roberts set his typewriter up on the veranda and worked on the growing manuscript of his book. After lunch, Judith once more went swimming. It was so unusually warm for this time of year that the middle of the day was almost unbearably hot. Several times Jason noted that Roberts stopped writing and stared down toward the beach where Judith was alternately swimming and sunning.

That night, as the three of them were seated on the veranda, following supper, Judith said, "You were going to tell me about those murders."

"I was?" Roberts said. "I can't imagine why; it's rather gruesome."

"Murder is always gruesome. But it's fascinating unless you're directly involved."

"I suppose," Roberts admitted. And for the first time when he was not working on his book, his familiar, sly, smile was not in evidence. "But there are elements in these murders which are almost unbelievable. In the first place there have been twelve of them at six-year intervals over the past seventy-eight years. Each murder was performed on that hidden stretch of beach behind the rocks, there. Each was performed at night about this time of the year — always in this month, in fact, although the dates seem ran-

dom. Each victim was disemboweled with a large pointed object believed to be a stone knife similar, it is believed, to knives used in certain primitive sacrificial rituals — though, oddly, none of these particular rituals are connected with the sea as these seem to be."

"But how could one person commit so many murders over such a long period?" Judith asked.

"Obviously, he couldn't," Roberts said. "Which suggests that there is an organized cult operating in this village which makes periodic sacrifice to some ocean deity. The victim, as I said, is disemboweled and the corpse is found inside a pentagram inscribed in the sand on the beach. Most police agencies seem to regard these crimes as mythical, or at the very least legendary, but the records are there. I've studied them."

"Wait a minute," Jason said. "Seventy-eight years at six periods and there have been twelve murders?"

"Yes," said Roberts.

"Then, if the schedule is adhered to we're due for the thirteenth any day now!"

"That's quite right," Roberts said. "Why else do you think I'd stay on here while working on the manuscript of my book?"

THE NEXT DAY Jason went into the village and visited Ca-

leb Whitehead. Whitehead had retired as town constable about five years ago.

"I remember the murders," he said in answer to Jason's questions. "I saw four of them while I was constable. Damnedest things. So many clues and yet they never led nowheres. All we knew was that the killer didn't come from around here."

"I don't understand," Jason said. "How could you know that?"

"The killer was always registered at the hotel — always vanished; at least someone registered at the hotel always vanished right after the crime. A couple times the victim was also registered at the hotel. The last victim was — a young girl, pretty, named Elise Farmer."

He rambled on, but nothing else that he said registered with Jason. Whitehead was getting on in years, anyway, and he was generally pretty vague and incoherent. As politely as he could, Jason withdrew himself and returned to the hotel.

That night after supper, Judith went upstairs. Moments later, she returned dressed for swimming, and carrying a large beach bag.

"You're not going swimming tonight — not alone," Jason exclaimed.

She laughed at his obvious perplexity. "I love to swim at night," she said. "Don't worry

about me, Jason, I'll be all right." And then she left. It was the first time she had ever called Jason by his first name and he just stood staring after her until a voice broke his train of thought.

"What?" he asked turning. Roberts was standing at the foot of the stairs.

"I asked if Judith went down to the beach."

"Why — why no. I think she said something about going into the village."

Roberts laughed. "I hardly think she'd go into the village at this time of night wearing only a swimming suit. I saw her upstairs."

"I don't . . . can't say. Maybe she might have gone down to the beach . . ."

"I think I'll wander down to the beach," Roberts said, "and make sure she's all right."

Jason watched Roberts walk out the door and, as he watched, he was filled with an odd sensation of horror. It was not a sensation he could put his finger on, really. Then he realized something; there had been an odd bulge in Roberts' coat pocket. Such a bulge as might have been made by a gun or . . . perhaps . . . perhaps a stone knife.

FOR A FULL ten seconds, Jason actually shook with uncontrollable fear. He wanted to cry out, to scream, to run in

panic but he was in the grip of paralysis that would let him do nothing but shake. He thought of Judith out on the beach, alone with Roberts. He thought of the soft contour of her stomach beneath the flimsy material of her swim suit and the jagged hardness of a stone knife. His fear grew but resolve grew also; he knew what he must do.

He ran upstairs to his room and threw open the door to his closet. He kept his gun in a shoebox at the back of the top closet shelf. It was an Army .45 automatic that he had fired only six or seven times on a target range, but he did keep the gun clean — and loaded — in spite of his dislike of weapons. He flipped off the safety and held the gun tightly as he ran down the stairs and out the hotel and toward the beach.

The beach was deserted.

Of course it was, he told himself. The murders were always committed on the stretch of beach beyond those big rocks. He couldn't see that stretch of beach; if only he wasn't too late. . . .

He heard them struggling as he made his way over the jagged rocks and then he saw them: Judith and Roberts, struggling not ten feet away from where a pentagram had already been drawn in the sand so that it showed up plainly in the moonlight.

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"Stop!" Jason cried out. "Stop it!"

Both of them saw him, then. Both froze as he pointed the gun waveringly at Roberts. Judith stepped away and Roberts' eyes widened in fear.

"No, Fidler! No!" cried Roberts.

Jason fired the heavy automatic. The report was loud and he had forgotten to brace his elbow. The recoil slammed his arm heavily against his breast with a stinging slap that cost him his balance. He fell backwards to the beach but as he fell he saw Roberts slumping to the beach.

Sitting up, his chest still smarting, Jason threw the gun from himself with blind rage as the fear and reaction ran their course.

"Jason . . ." someone said. He blinked, looked up. It was Judith, of course; she had spoken his name . . .

"I've never killed a man before," he said. "I've never killed anything before."

"I'm sorry," Judith said. "You should have stayed back at the hotel. He had a gun. He couldn't

know how easily I can disarm a man. He thought he had me, but I took the gun away and threw it out to the sea before you showed up."

Her words were puzzling. Jason frowned. "Gun? No. He had a knife. I saw the bulge in his pocket. A stone knife."

"You don't understand," Judith said. "I'm sorry, Jason. I wish you didn't have to be a part of this but the victim has to be disemboweled alive. Obviously he won't do now that he's dead. And if I don't make the sacrifice, I'll lose my youth and beauty. You could never believe how old I really am. I can't lose my youth and beauty, Jason; I couldn't stand growing old. You *do* understand, don't you?"

Jason got to his feet as she reached into the beach bag. He started backing away but she came toward him, slowly, a lithe beautiful figure in the moonlight. Jason backed up until he was standing against a wall of rock and could move back no farther. She continued walking toward him and in her hand there was a stone knife.

Jason understood.

The Tell - Tale Heart

by Edgar Allan Poe

TRUE! — NERVOUS — very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am! but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses — not destroyed them — not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily — how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea estered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture — a pale blue eye, with a film over it Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran

Blind fools! See how easily I could have deceived you if only . . .

cold; and so by degrees — very gradually — I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded — with what caution — with what foresight — with what dissimulation I went to work!

I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night about midnight. I turned the latch of his door and opened it — oh, so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly — very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! — would a mad-man have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously — oh, so cautiously — cautiously (for the hinges creaked) — I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye.

And this I did for seven long nights — every night just at midnight — but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve. I looked in upon him while he slept.

UPON THE eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I *felt* the extent of my own powers — of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back — but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers) and

so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out — "Who's there?"

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening — just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief — oh no — it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it was welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy

them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself — "It is nothing but the wind in the chimney — it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he has been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions; but he had found all in vain. *All in vain*; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel — although he neither saw nor heard — to *feel* the presence of my head within the room.

WHEN I HAD waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little — a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it — you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily — until, at length, a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and full upon the vulture eye.

It was open — wide, wide open — and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness — all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had direct-

ed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And now have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the senses? — now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew *that* sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror *must* have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! — do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me — the sound would be heard by a neighbor! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I

threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once — once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye — not even *his* — could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out — no stain of any kind — no blood-spot whatever. I had been too

wary for that. A tub had caught all — hal ha

WHEN I HAD made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock — still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart — for what had I *now* to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night: suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled — for *what* had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country, I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search — search *well*. I led them, at length, to *his* chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them *here* to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My *manner* had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct — it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definitiveness — until, at length, I found that the noise was *not* within my ears.

No doubt I now grew *very* pale — but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased — what could I do? It was a *low, dull, quick sound — much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*. I gasped for breath — and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly — more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations, but the noise steadily increased. Why *would* they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observation of the men — but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what *could* I do? I foamed — I raved — I swore. I swung the

chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder — louder — *louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! — no, no! They heard! — they suspected! — they *knew!* — they were making a *mockery* of my horror! — this I thought, and this I think.

But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision. I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! — and now — again! — hark! louder! louder! *louder!* —

“Villains!” I shrieked, “dissemble no more! I admit the deed! — tear up the planks! — here, here! — it is the beating of his hideous heart!”

Two notable collections of strange and bizzare tales have recently been released by Arkham House: Publishers, Sauk City, Wisconsin. These are handsome, well-made books, uniform in format with the other Arkham House editions in general.

The Quick and the Dead gathers together ten stories by Vincent Starrett, known for his writing on Sherlock Holmes and Ambrose Bierce, and his weekly column, *Books Today*, in the CHICAGO TRIBUNE.

The stories are: *The Fugitive*, *The Man in the Cask*, *The Quick and the Dead*, *The Sinless Village*, *The Head of Cromwell*, *Penelope*, *The Elixer of Death*, *Coffins for Two*, *The Tattooed Man*, and *Footsteps of Fear*. The very fine cover jacket is by Frank Utpatel. Price: \$3.50.

Strange Harvest gathers together 17 stories by Donald Wandrei, who was August Derleth's partner in founding Arkham House, and has long been a favorite with readers of weird tales and science fiction.

The stories are: *Spawn of the Sea*, *Something From Above*, *The Green Flame*, *Strange Harvest*, *The Chuckler*, *The Whisperers*, *The Destroying Horde*, *Uneasy Lie the Drowned*, *Life Current*, *The Fire Vampires*, *The Atom-Smasher*, *Murray's Light*, *The Man Who Never Lived*, *Infinity Zero*, *A Trip to Infinity*, *Giant-Plasm*, and *Nightmare*. The jacket drawing is by the author's brother — the late Howard Wandrei, who also wrote notable bizarre fiction — and is excellent. Price: \$4.00.

The Lurking Fear

by H. P. Lovecraft

I. THE SHADOW ON THE CHIMNEY

THERE WAS thunder in the air on the night I went to the deserted mansion atop Tempest Mountain to find the lurking fear. I was not alone, for foolhardiness was not then mixed with that love of the grotesque and the terrible which has made my career a series of quests for strange horrors in literature and in life. With me were two faithful and muscular men for whom I had sent when the time came; men long associated with me in

my ghastly explorations because of their peculiar fitness.

We had started quietly from the village because of the reporters who still lingered about after the eldritch panic of a month before — the nightmare creeping death. Later, I thought, they might aid me; but I did not want them then. Would to God I had let them share the search, that I might not have had to bear the secret alone so long; to bear it alone for fear the world would call me mad or go mad itself at the demon

Stark horror hangs over the entire area of the deserted Martense mansion, and grisly death awaits . . .

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House.

implications of the thing. Now that I am telling it anyway, lest the brooding make me a manic, I wish I had never concealed it. For I, and I only, know what manner of fear lurked on that spectral and desolate mountain.

In a small motor-car we covered the miles of primeval forest and hill until the wooded ascent checked it. The country bore an aspect more than usually sinister as we viewed it by night and without the accustomed crowds of investigators, so that we were often tempted to use the acetylene headlight despite the attention it might attract. It was not a wholesome landscape after dark, and I believe I would have noticed its morbidity even had I been ignorant of the terror that stalked there. Of wild creatures there were none — they are wise when death leers close. The ancient lightning-scarred trees seemed unnaturally large and twisted, and the other vegetation unnaturally thick and feverish, while curious mounds and hummocks in the weedy, fulgurite-pitted earth reminded me of snakes and dead men's skulls swelled to gigantic proportions.

Fear had lurked on Tempest Mountain for more than a century. This I learned at once from newspaper accounts of the catastrophe which first brought the region to the world's notice.

The place is a remote, lonely elevation in that part of the Catskills where Dutch civilization once feebly and transiently penetrated, leaving behind as it receded only a few ruined mansions and a degenerate squatter population inhabiting pitiful hamlets on isolated slopes. Normal beings seldom visited the locality till the state police were formed, and even now only infrequent troopers patrol it. The fear, however, is an old tradition throughout the neighboring villages; since it is a prime topic in the simple discourse of the poor mongrels who sometimes leave their valleys to trade handwoven baskets for such primitive necessities as they cannot shoot, raise, or make.

THE LURKING fear dwelt in the shunned and deserted Martense mansion, which crowned the high but gradual eminence whose liability to frequent thunderstorms gave it the name of Tempest Mountain. For over a hundred years the antique, grove-circled stone house had been the subject of stories incredibly wild and monstrously hideous; stories of a silent colossal creeping death which stalked abroad in summer. With whimpering insistence the squatters told tales of a demon which seized lone wayfarers after dark, either carrying them off or leaving them in a frightful state of

gnawed dismemberment; while sometimes they whispered of bloodtrails toward the distant mansion. Some said the thunder called the lurking fear out of its habitation, while others said the thunder was its voice.

No one outside the backwoods had believed these varying and conflicting stories, with their incoherent, extravagant descriptions of the half-glimpsed fiend; yet not a farmer or villager doubted that the Martense mansion was ghoulishly haunted. Local history forbade such a doubt, although no ghostly evidence was ever found by such investigators as had visited the building after some especially vivid tale of the squatters. Grandmothers told strange myths of the Martense spectre; myths concerning the Martense family itself, its queer hereditary dissimilarity of eyes, its long, unnatural annals, and the murder which had cursed it.

The terror which brought me to the scene was a sudden and portentous confirmation of the mountaineers' wildest legends. One summer night, after a thunderstorm of unprecedented violence, the countryside was aroused by a squatter stampede which no mere delusion could create. The pitiful throngs of natives shrieked and whined of the unnamable horror which had descended upon them, and they were not doubted. They had not

seen it, but had heard such cries from one of their hamlets that they knew a creeping death had come.

IN THE morning citizens and state troopers followed the shuddering mountaineers to the place where they said the death had come. Death was indeed there. The ground under one of the squatter's villages had caved in after a lightning stroke, destroying several of the malodorous shanties; but upon this property damage was superimposed an organic devastation which paled it to insignificance. Of a possible seventy-five natives who had inhabited this spot, not one living specimen was visible. The disordered earth was covered with blood and human debris bespeaking too vividly the ravages of demon teeth and talons; yet no visible trail led away from the carnage. That some hideous animal must be the cause, everyone quickly agreed; nor did any tongue now revive the charge that such cryptic deaths formed merely the sordid murders common in decadent communities. That charge was revived only when about twenty-five of the estimated population were found missing from the dead; and even then it was hard to explain the murder of fifty by half that number. But the fact remained that on a summer night a bolt had come out

of the heavens and left a dead village whose corpses were horribly mangled, chewed, and clawed.

The excited countryside immediately connected the horror with the haunted Martense mansion, though the localities were over three miles apart. The troopers were more skeptical; including the mansion only casually in their investigations, and dropping it altogether when they found it thoroughly deserted. Country and village people, however, canvassed the place with infinite care; overturning everything in the house, sounding ponds and brooks, beating down bushes, and ransacking the nearby forests. All was in vain; the death that had come had left no trace save destruction itself.

By the second day of the search the affair was fully treated by the newspapers, whose reporters overran Tempest Mountain. They described it in much detail, and with many interviews to elucidate the horror's history as told by local grandams. I followed the accounts languidly at first, for I am a connoisseur in horrors; but after a week I detected an atmosphere which stirred me oddly, so that on August 5th, 1921, I registered among the reporters who crowded the hotel at Lefferts Corners, nearest village to Tempest Mountain and acknowledged

headquarters of the searchers. Three weeks more, and the dispersal of the reporters left me free to begin a terrible exploration based on the minute inquiries and surveying with which I had meanwhile busied myself.

So on this summer night, while distant thunder rumbled, I left a silent motor-car and tramped with two armed companions up the last mound-covered reaches of Tempest Mountain, casting the beams of an electric torch on the spectral gray walls that began to appear through giant oaks ahead. In this morbid night solitude and feeble shifting illumination, the vast boxlike pile displayed obscure hints of terror which day could not uncover; yet I did not hesitate, since I had come with fierce resolution to test an idea. I believed that the thunder called the death-demon out of some fearsome secret place; and be that demon solid entity or vaporous pestilence, I meant to see it.

I HAD thoroughly searched the ruin before, hence knew my plan well; choosing as the seat of my vigil the old room of Jan Martense, whose murder looms so great in the rural legends. I felt subtly that the apartment of this ancient victim was best for my purposes. The chamber, measuring about twenty feet square, contained like the other rooms some rubbish which had

once been furniture. It lay on the second story, on the southeast corner of the house, and had an immense east window and narrow south window, both devoid of panes or shutters. Opposite the large window was an enormous Dutch fireplace with scriptural tiles representing the prodigal son, and opposite the narrow window was a spacious bed built into the wall.

As the tree-muffled thunder grew louder, I arranged my plan's details. First I fastened side-by-side to the ledge of the large window three rope ladders which I had brought with me. I knew they reached a suitable spot on the grass outside, for I had tested them. Then the three of us dragged from another room a wide four-poster bedstead, crowding it laterally against the window. Having strewn it with fir boughs, all now rested on it with drawn automatics, two relaxing while the third watched. From whatever direction the demon might come, our potential escape was provided. If it came from within the house, we had the window ladders; if from outside the door and the stairs. We did not think, judging from precedent, that it would pursue us far even at worst.

I watched from midnight to one o'clock, when in spite of the sinister house, the unprotected window, and the approaching

thunder and lightning, I felt singularly drowsy. I was between my two companions, George Bennett being toward the window and William Tobey toward the fireplace. Bennett was asleep, having apparently felt the same anomalous drowsiness which affected me, so I designated Tobey for the next watch although even he was nodding. It is curious how intently I had been watching the fireplace.

THE INCREASING thunder must have affected my dreams, for in the brief time I slept there came to me apocalyptic visions. Once I partly awaked, probably because the sleeper toward the window had restlessly flung an arm across my chest. I was not sufficiently awake to see whether Tobey was attending to his duties as sentinel, but felt a distinct anxiety on that score. Never before had the presence of evil so poignantly oppressed me. Later I must have dropped asleep again, for it was out of a phantasmal chaos that my mind leaped when the night grew hideous with shrieks beyond anything in my former experience or imagination.

In that shrieking the inmost soul of human fear and agony clawed hopelessly and insanely at the ebony gates of oblivion. I awoke to red madness and

the mockery of diabolism, as farther and farther down inconceivable vistas that phobic and crystalline anguish retreated and reverberated. There was no light, but I knew from the empty space at my right that Tobey was gone, God alone knew whither. Across my chest still lay the heavy arm of the sleeper at my left.

Then came the devastating stroke of lightning which shook the whole mountain, lit the darkest crypts of the hoary grove, and splintered the patriarch of the twisted trees. In the demon flash of a monstrous fireball the sleeper started up suddenly while the glare from beyond the window threw his shadow vividly upon the chimney above the fireplace from which my eyes had never strayed. That I am still alive and sane, is a marvel I cannot fathom. I cannot fathom it, for the shadow on that chimney was not that of George Bennett or of any other human creature, but a blasphemous abnormality from hell's nethermost craters; a nameless, shapeless abomination which no mind could fully grasp and no pen even partly describe. In another second I was alone in the accursed mansion, shivering and gibbering. George Bennett and William Tobey had left no trace, not even of a struggle. They were never heard of again.

II. A PASSER IN THE STORM

FOR DAYS after that hideous experience in the forest-swathed mansion I lay nervously exhausted in my hotel room at Lefferts Corners. I do not remember exactly how I managed to reach the motor-car, start it, and slip unobserved back to the village; for I retain no distinct impression save of wild-armed titan trees, demoniac mutterings of thunder, and Charonian shadows athwart the low mounds that dotted and streaked the region.

As I shivered and brooded on the casting of that brain-blasting shadow, I knew that I had at last pried out one of earth's supreme horrors — one of those nameless blights of outer voids whose faint demon scratchings we sometimes hear on the farthest rim of space, yet from which our own finite vision has given us a merciful immunity. The shadow I had seen, I hardly dared to analyse or identify. Something had lain between me and the window that night, but I shuddered whenever I could not cast off the instinct to classify it. If it had only snarled, or bayed, or laughed titteringly — even that would have relieved the abysmal hideousness. But it was so silent. It had rested a heavy arm or foreleg on my chest. . . . Obviously it was organic, or had once been organ-

ic. . . . Jan Martense, whose room I had invaded, was buried in the graveyard near the mansion. . . . I must find Bennett and Tobey, if they lived . . . why had it picked them, and left me for the last? . . . Drowsiness is so stifling, and dreams are so horrible. . . .

In a short time I realized that I must tell my story to someone or break down completely. I had already decided not to abandon the quest for the lurking fear, for in my rash ignorance it seemed to me that uncertainty was worse than enlightenment, however terrible the latter might prove to be. Accordingly I resolved in my mind the best course to pursue; whom to select for my confidences, and how to track down the thing which had obliterated two men and cast a nightmare shadow.

My chief acquaintances at Lefferts Corners had been the affable reporters, of whom several had still remained to collect final echoes of the tragedy. It was from these that I determined to choose a colleague, and the more I reflected the more my preference inclined toward one Arthur Munroe, a dark, lean man of about thirty-five, whose education, taste, intelligence, and temperament all seemed to mark him as one not bound to conventional ideas and experiences.

ON AN afternoon in early September, Arthur Munroe listened to my story. I saw from the beginning that he was both interested and sympathetic, and when I had finished he analysed and discussed the thing with the greatest shrewdness and judgement. His advice, moreover, was eminently practical; for he recommended a postponement of operations at the Martense mansion until we might become fortified with more detailed historical and geographical data. On his initiative we combed the countryside for information regarding the terrible Martense family, and discovered a man who possessed a marvellously illuminating ancestral diary. We also talked at length with such of the mountain mongrels as had not fled from the terror and confusion to remoter slopes, and arranged to precede our culminating task with the exhaustive and definitive examination of spots associated with the various tragedies of squatter legend.

The results of this examination were not at first very enlightening, though our tabulation of them seemed to reveal a fairly significant trend; namely, that the number of reported horrors was by far the greatest in areas either comparatively near the avoided house or connected with it by stretches of the morbidly over-nourished for-

est. There were, it is true, exceptions; indeed, the horror which had caught the world's ear had happened in a treeless space remote alike from the mansion and from any connecting woods.

As to the nature and appearance of the lurking fear, nothing could be gained from the scared and witless shanty-dwellers. In the same breath they called it a snake and a giant, a thunder-devil and a bat, a vulture and a walking tree. We did, however, deem ourselves justified in assuming that it was a living organism highly susceptible to electrical storms; and although certain of the stories suggested wings, we believed that its aversion for open spaces made land locomotion a more probable theory. The only thing really incompatible with the latter view was the rapidity with which the creature must have travelled in order to perform all the deeds attributed to it.

When we came to know the squatters better, we found them curiously likeable in many ways. Simple animals they were, gently descending the evolutionary scale because of their unfortunate ancestry and stultifying isolation. They feared outsiders, but slowly grew accustomed to us; finally helping vastly when we beat down all the thickets and tore out all the partitions of the mansion in our search

for the lurking fear. When we asked them to help us find Bennett and Tobey they were truly distressed; for they wanted to help us, yet knew that these victims had gone as wholly out of the world as their own missing people. That great numbers of them had actually been killed and removed, just as the wild animals had long been exterminated, we were of course thoroughly convinced; and we waited apprehensively for further tragedies to occur.

BY THE middle of October we were puzzled by our lack of progress. Owing to the clear nights no demoniac aggressions had taken place, and the completeness of our vain searches of house and country almost drove us to regard the lurking fear as a non-material agency. We feared that the cold weather would come on and halt our explorations, for all agreed that the demon was generally quiet in winter. Thus there was a kind of haste and desperation in our last daylight canvas of the horror-visited hamlet; a hamlet now deserted because of the squatters' fears.

The ill-fated squatter hamlet had borne no name, but had long stood in a sheltered though treeless cleft between two elevations called respectively Cone Mountain and Maple Hill. It was closer to Maple Hill than

to Cone Mountain, some of the crude abodes indeed being dug-outs on the side of the former eminence. Geographically it lay about two miles northwest of the base of Tempest Mountain, and three miles from the oak-girt mansion. Of the distance between the hamlet and the mansion, fully two miles and a quarter on the hamlet's side was entirely open country; the plain being of fairly level character save for some of the low snake-like mounds, and having as vegetation only grass and scattered weeds. Considering this topography, we had finally concluded that the demon must have come by way of Cone Mountain, a wooded southern prolongation of which ran to within a short distance of the westernmost spur of Tempest Mountain. The upheaval of ground we traced conclusively to a landslide from Maple Hill, a tall lone splintered tree on whose side had been the striking point of the thunderbolt which summoned the fiend.

As for the twentieth time or more Arthur Munroe and I went minutely over every inch of the violated village, we were filled with a certain discouragement coupled with vague and novel fears. It was acutely uncanny, even when frightful and uncanny things were common, to encounter so blankly clueless a scene after such overwhelming occur-

rences; and we moved about beneath the leaden, darkening sky with that tragic directionless zeal which results from a combined sense of futility and necessity of action. Our care was gravely minute; every cottage was again entered, every hillside dugout again searched for bodies, every thorny foot of adjacent slope again scanned for dens and caves, but all without result. And yet, as I have said, vague new fears hovered menacingly over us; as if giant bat-winged gryphons looked on trans-cosmic gulfs.

AS THE afternoon advanced, it became increasingly difficult to see; and we heard the rumble of a thunderstorm gathering over Tempest Mountain. This sound in such a locality naturally stirred us, though less than it would have done at night. As it was, we hoped desperately that the storm would last until well after dark; and with that hope turned from our aimless hillside searching toward the nearest inhabited hamlet to gather a body of squatters as helpers in the investigation. Timid as they were, a few of the younger men were sufficiently inspired by our protective leadership to promise such help.

We had hardly more than turned, however, when there descended such a blinding sheet of torrential rain that shelter be-

came imperative. The extreme, almost nocturnal darkness of the sky caused us to stumble badly, but guided by the frequent flashes of lightning and by our minute knowledge of the hamlet we soon reached the least porous cabin of the lot; an heterogeneous combination of logs and boards whose still existing door and single tiny window both faced Maple Hill. Barring the door after us against the fury of the wind and rain, we put in place the crude window shutter which our frequent searches had taught us where to find. It was dismal sitting there on rickety boxes in the pitchy darkness, but we smoked pipes and occasionally flashed our pocket lamps about. Now and then we could see the lightning through cracks in the wall; the afternoon was so incredibly dark that each flash was extremely vivid.

The stormy vigil reminded me shudderingly of my ghastly night on Tempest Mountain. My mind turned to that odd question which had kept recurring ever since the nightmare thing had happened; and again I wondered why the demon, approaching the three watchers either from the window or the interior, had begun with the men on each side and left the middle man till the last, when the titan fireball had scared it away. Why had it not taken its

victims in natural order, with myself second, from whichever direction it had approached? With what manner of far-reaching tentacles did it prey? Or did it know that I was the leader, and saved me for a fate worse than that of my companions?

In the midst of these reflections, as if dramatically arranged to intensify them, there fell nearby a terrific bolt of lightning followed by the sound of sliding earth. At the same time the wolfish wind rose to demoniac crescendos of ululation. We were sure that the one tree on Maple Hill had been struck again, and Munroe rose from his box and went to the tiny window to ascertain the damage. When he took down the shutter the wind and rain howled deafeningly in, so that I could not hear what he said; but I waited while he leaned out and tried to fathom Nature's pandemonium.

Gradually a calming of the wind and dispersal of the unusual darkness told of the storm's passing. I had hoped it would last into the night to help our quest, but a furtive sunbeam from a knothole behind me removed the likelihood of such a thing. Suggesting to Munroe that we had better get some light even if more showers came, I unbarred and opened the crude door. The ground outside was a singular mass of mud and

pools, with fresh heaps of earth from the slight landslide; but I saw nothing to justify the interest which kept my companion silently leaning out the window. Crossing to where he leaned, I touched his shoulder; but he did not move. Then, as I playfully shook him and turned him around, I felt the strangling tendrils of a cancerous horror whose roots reached into ilimitable pasts and fathomless abyssms of the night that broods beyond time.

For Arthur Munroe was dead. And on what remained of his chewed and gouged head there was no longer a face.

III. WHAT THE RED GLARE MEANT

ON THE tempest-racked night of November 8, 1921, with a lantern which cast charnel shadows, I stood digging alone and idiotically in the grave of Jan Martense. I had begun to dig in the afternoon, because a thunderstorm was brewing, and now that it was dark and the storm had burst above the maniacally thick foliage I was glad.

I believe that my mind was partly unhinged by events since August 5th; the demon shadow in the mansion, the general strain and disappointment, and the thing that occurred at the hamlet in an October storm. After that thing I had dug a grave for one whose death I

could not understand. I knew that others could not understand either, so let them think Arthur Munroe had wandered away. They searched, but found nothing. The squatters might have understood, but I dared not frighten them more. I myself seemed strangely callous. That shock at the mansion had done something to my brain, and I could think only of the quest for a horror now grown to cataclysmic stature in my imagination; a quest which the fate of Arthur Munroe made me vow to keep silent and solitary.

The scene of my excavations would alone have been enough to unnerve any ordinary man. Baleful primal trees of unholy size, age, and grotesqueness leered above me like the pillars of some hellish Druidic temple; muffling the thunder, hushing the clawing wind, and admitting but little rain. Beyond the scarred trunks in the background, illumined by faint flashes of filtered lightning, rose the damp ivied stones of the deserted mansion, while somewhat nearer was the abandoned Dutch garden whose walks and beds were polluted by a white, fungous, foetid, over-nourished vegetation that never saw full daylight. And nearest of all was the graveyard, where deformed trees tossed insane branches as their roots displaced unhallowed slabs and sucked venom from

what lay below. Now and then, beneath the brown pall of leaves that rotted and festered in the antediluvian forest darkness, I could trace the sinister outlines of some of those low mounds which characterized the lightning-pierced region.

HISTORY HAD led me to this archaic grave. History, indeed, was all I had after everything else ended in mocking Satanism. I now believed that the lurking fear was no material thing, but a wolf-fanged ghost that rode the midnight lightning. And I believed, because of the masses of local tradition I had unearthed in search with Arthur Munroe, that the ghost was that of Jan Martense, who died in 1762. This is why I was digging idiotically in his grave.

The Martense mansion was built in 1670 by Gerrit Martense, a wealthy New-Amsterdam merchant who disliked the changing order under British rule, and had constructed this magnificent domicile on a remote woodland summit whose untrodden solitude and unusual scenery pleased him. The only substantial disappointment encountered in this site was that which concerned the prevalence of violent thunderstorms in summer. When selecting the hill and building his mansion, Mynheer Martense had laid these frequent natural outbursts to some

peculiarity of the year; but in time he perceived that the locality was especially liable to such phenomena. At length, having found these storms injurious to his head, he fitted up a cellar into which he could retreat from their wildest pandemonium.

Of Gerrit Martense's descendants less is known than of himself; since they were all reared in hatred of the English civilization, and trained to shun such of the colonists as accepted it. Their life was exceedingly secluded, and people declared that their isolation had made them heavy of speech and comprehension. In appearance all were marked by a peculiar inherited dissimilarity of eyes; one generally being blue and the other brown. Their social contacts grew fewer and fewer, till at last they took to intermarrying with the numerous menial class about the estate. Many of the crowded family degenerated, moved across the valley, and merged with the mongrel population which was later to produce the pitiful squatters. The rest had stuck sullenly to their ancestral mansion, becoming more and more clannish and taciturn, yet developing a nervous responsiveness to the frequent thunderstorms.

Most of this information reached the outside world through young Jan Martense, who from some kind of restless-

ness joined the colonial army when news of the Albany Convention reached Tempest Mountain. He was the first of Gerrit's descendants to see much of the world; and when he returned in 1760 after six years of campaigning, he was hated as an outsider by his father, uncles, and brothers, in spite of his dissimilar Martense eyes. No longer could he share the peculiarities and prejudices of the Martenses, while the very mountain thunderstorms failed to intoxicate him as they had before. Instead, his surroundings depressed him, and he frequently wrote to a friend in Albany of plans to leave the paternal roof.

IN THE spring of 1763, Jonathan Gifford, the Albany friend of Jan Martense, became worried by his correspondent's silence; especially in view of the conditions and quarrels at the Martense mansion. Determined to visit Jan in person, he went into the mountains on horseback. His diary states that he reached Tempest Mountain on September 20, finding the mansion in great decrepitude. The sullen, odd-eyed Martenses, whose unclean animal aspect shocked him, told him in broken gutturals that Jan was dead. He had, they insisted, been struck by lightning the autumn before; and now lay buried behind the neglected sunken gar-

dens. They showed the visitor the grave, barren and devoid of markers. Something in the Martenses' manner gave Gifford a feeling of repulsion and suspicion, and a week later he returned with spade and mattock to explore the sepulchral spot. He found what he expected — a skull crushed cruelly as if by savage blows — so returning to Albany he openly charged the Martenses with the murder of their kinsman.

Legal evidence was lacking, but the story spread rapidly round the countryside; and from that time the Martenses were ostracised by the world. No one would deal with them, and their distant manor was shunned as an accursed place. Somehow they managed to live on independently by the product of their estate, for occasional lights glimpsed from far-away hills attested their continued presence. These lights were seen as late as 1810, but toward the last they became very infrequent.

Meanwhile there grew up about the mansion and the mountain a body of diabolic legendry. The place was avoided with doubled assiduousness, and invested with every whispered myth tradition could supply. It remained unvisited till 1816, when the continued absence of lights was noticed by squatters. At that time a

party made investigations, finding the house deserted and partly in ruins.

There were no skeletons about, so that departure rather than death was inferred. The clan seemed to have left several years before, and improvised penthouses showed how numerous it had grown prior to its migration. Its cultural level had fallen very low, as proved by decaying furniture and scattered silverware which must have been long abandoned when its owners left. But though the dreaded Martenses were gone, the fear of the haunted house continued; and grew very acute when new and strange stories arose among the mountain decadents. There it stood; deserted, feared, and linked with the vengeful ghost of Jan Martense. There it stood on the night I dug in Jan Martense's grave.

I HAVE described my protracted digging as idiotic, and such it indeed was in object and method. The coffin of Jan Martense had soon been unearthed — it now held only dust and nitre — but in my fury to exhume his ghost I delved irrationally and clumsily down beneath where he had lain. God knows what I expected to find — I only felt that I was digging in the grave of a man whose ghost stalked by night.

It is impossible to say what monstrous depth I had attained when my spade, and soon my feet, broke through the ground beneath. The event, under circumstances, was tremendous; for in the existence of a subterranean space here, my mad theories had terrible confirmation. My slight fall had extinguished the lantern, but I produced an electric pocket lamp and viewed the small horizontal tunnel which led away indefinitely in both directions. It was amply large enough for a man to wriggle through; and though no sane person would have tried at that time, I forgot danger, reason, and cleanliness in my single-minded fever to unearth the lurking fear. Choosing the direction toward the house, I scrambled recklessly into the narrow burrow; squirming ahead blindly and rapidly, and flashing but seldom the lamp I kept before me.

What language can describe the spectacle of a man lost in infinitely abysmal earth; pawing, twisting, wheezing; scrambling madly through sunken convolutions of immemorial blackness without an idea of time, safety, direction, or definite object? There is something hideous in it, but that is what I did. I did it for so long that life faded to a far memory, and I became one with the moles

and grubs of nighted depths. Indeed, it was only by accident that after interminable writhings I jarred my forgotten electric lamp alight, so that it shone eerily along the burrow of caked loam that stretched and curved ahead.

I HAD BEEN scrambling in this way for some time, so that my battery had burned very low, when the passage suddenly inclined sharply upward, altering my mode of progress. And as I raised my glance, it was without preparation that I saw glistening in the distance two demoniac reflections of my expiring lamp; two reflections glowing with a baneful and unmistakable effulgence, and provoking maddeningly nebulous memories. I stopped automatically, though lacking the brain to retreat. The eyes approached, yet of the thing that bore them I could distinguish only a claw. But what a claw. Then far overhead I heard a faint crashing which I recognized. It was the wild thunder of the mountain, raised to hysteric fury — I must have been crawling upward for some time, so that the surface was now quite near. And as the muffled thunder clattered, those eyes still stared with vacuous viciousness.

Thank God I did not then know what it was, else I should have died. But I was saved by

the very thunder that had summoned it, for after a hideous wait there burst from the unseen outside sky one of those frequent mountainward bolts whose aftermath I had noticed here and there as gashes of disturbed earth and fulgurites of various sizes. With Cyclopean rage it tore through the soil above that damnable pit, blinding and deafening me, yet not wholly reducing me to a coma.

In the chaos of sliding, shifting earth I clawed and floundered helplessly till the rain on my head steadied me and I saw that I had come to the surface in a familiar spot; a steep un-forested place on the southwest slope of the mountain. Recurrent sheet lightnings illumed the tumbled ground and the remains of the curious low hummock which had stretched down from the wooded higher slope, but there was nothing in the chaos to show my place of egress from the lethal catacomb. My brain was as great a chaos as the earth, and as a distant red glare burst on the landscape from the south I hardly realized the horror I had been through.

But when two days later the squatters told me what the red glare meant, I felt more horror than that which the mound-burrow and the claw and eyes had given; more horror because of the overwhelming implications. In a hamlet twenty miles

away an orgy of fear had followed the bolt which brought me above ground, and a nameless thing had dropped from an overhanging tree into a weak-roofed cabin. It had done a deed, but the squatters had fired the cabin in frenzy before it could escape. It had been doing that deed at the very moment the earth caved in on the thing with claw and eyes.

IV. THE HORROR IN THE EYES

THERE CAN BE nothing normal in the mind of one who, knowing what I knew of the horrors of Tempest Mountain, would seek alone for the fear that lurked there. That at least two of the fear's embodiments were destroyed, formed but a slight guarantee of mental and physical safety in this Acheron of multiform diabolism; yet I continued my conquest with even greater zeal as events and revelations became more monstrous.

When, two days after my frightful crawl through that crypt of the eyes and claw, I learned that a thing had malignly hovered twenty miles away at the same instant the eyes were glaring at me, I experienced virtual convulsions of fright. But that fright was so mixed with wonder and alluring grotesqueness, that it was almost a pleasant sensation.

Sometimes, in the throes of a nightmare when unseen powers whirl one over the roofs of strange dead cities toward the grinning chasm of Nis, it is a relief and even a delight to shriek wildly and throw oneself voluntarily along with the hideous vortex of dream doom into whatever bottomless gulf may yawn. And so it was with the walking nightmare of Tempest Mountain; the discovery that two monsters had haunted the spot gave me ultimately a mad craving to plunge into the very earth of the accursed region, and with bare hands dig out the death that leered from every inch of the poisonous soil.

As soon as possible I visited the grave of Jan Martense and dug vainly where I had dug before. Some extensive cave-in had obliterated all trace of the underground passage, while the rain had washed so much earth back into the excavation that I could not tell how deeply I had dug that other day. I likewise made a difficult trip to the distant hamlet where the death-creature had been burnt, and was little repaid for my trouble. In the ashes of the fateful cabin I found several bones, but apparently none of the monster's. The squatters said the thing had had only one victim; but in this I judged them inaccurate, since besides

the complete skull of a human being, there was another bony fragment which seemed certainly to have belonged to a human skull at some time. Though the rapid drop of the monster had been seen, no one could say just what the creature was like; those who had glimpsed it called it simply a devil. Examining the great tree where it had lurked, I could discern no distinctive marks. I tried to find some trail into the black forest, but on this occasion could not stand the sight of those morbidly large boles, or of those vast serpent-like roots that twisted so malevolently before they sank into the earth.

MY NEXT step was to re-examine with microscopic care the deserted hamlet where death had come most abundantly, and where Arthur Munroe had seen something he never lived to describe. Though my vain previous searches had been exceedingly minute, I now had new data to test; for my horrible grave-crawl convinced me that at least one of the phases of the monstrosity had been an underground creature. This time, on the 14th of November, my quest concerned itself mostly with the slopes of Cone Mountain and Maple Hill where they overlook the unfortunate hamlet, and I gave par-

ticular attention to the loose earth of the landslide region on the latter eminence.

The afternoon of my search brought nothing to light, and dusk came as I stood on Maple Hill looking down at the Hamlet and across the valley to Tempest Mountain. There had been a gorgeous sunset, and now the moon came up, nearly full and shedding a silver flood over the plain, the distant mountainside, and the curious low mounds that rose here and there. It was a peaceful Arcadian scene, but knowing what it hid I hated it. I hated the mocking moon, the hypocritical plain, the festering mountain, and those sinister mounds. Everything seemed to me tainted with a loathsome contagion, and inspired by a noxious alliance with distorted hidden powers.

Presently, as I gazed abstractedly at the moonlit panorama, my eye became attracted by something singular in the nature and arrangement of a certain topographical element. Without having any exact knowledge of geology, I had from the first been interested in the odd mounds and hummocks of the region. I had noticed that they were pretty widely distributed around Tempest Mountain, though less numerous on the plain than near the hilltop itself, where

prehistoric glaciation had doubtless found feeble opposition to its striking and fantastic caprices. Now, in the light of that low moon which cast long weird shadows, it struck me forcibly that the various points and lines of the mound system had a peculiar relation to the summit of Tempest Mountain. That summit was undeniably a center from which the lines or rows of points radiated indefinitely and irregular, as if the unwholesome Martense mansion had thrown visible tentacles of terror. The idea of such tentacles gave me an unexplained thrill, and I stopped to analyze my reason for believing these mounds glacial phenomena.

THE MORE I analyzed the less I believed, and against my newly opened mind there began grotesque and horrible analogies based on superficial aspects and upon my experience beneath the earth. Before I knew it I was uttering frenzied and disjointed words to myself; "My God! . . . Molehills . . . the damned place must be honeycombed . . . how many . . . that night at the mansion . . . they took Bennett and Tobey first . . . on each side of us . . ." Then I was digging frantically into the mound which had stretched nearest me; digging desperately, shiveringly, but almost jubilantly;

digging and at last shrieking aloud with some unplaced emotion as I came upon a tunnel or burrow just like the one through which I had crawled on the other demoniac night.

After that I recall running, spade in hand; a hideous run across moon-litten, mound-marked meadows and through diseased, precipitous abysses of haunted hillside forest; leaping, screaming, panting, bounding toward the terrible Martense mansion. I recall digging unreasonably in all parts of the brier-choked cellar; digging to find the core and center of that malignant universe of mounds. And then I recall how I laughed when I stumbled on the passageway; the hole at the base of the old chimney, where the thick weeds grew and cast queer shadows in the light of the lone candle I had happened to have with me. What still remained down in that hellhive, lurking and waiting for the thunder to arouse it, I did not know. Two had been killed; perhaps that had finished it. But still there remained that burning determination to reach the innermost secret of the fear, which I had once more come to deem definite, material, and organic.

My indecisive speculation whether to explore the passage alone and immediately with my pocket-light or to try to assem-

ble a band of squatters for the quest, was interrupted after a time by a sudden rush of wind from the outside which blew out the candle and left me in stark blackness. The moon no longer shone through the chinks and apertures above me, and with a sense of fateful alarm I heard the sinister and significant rumble of approaching thunder. A confusion of associated ideas possessed my brain, leading me to grope back toward the farthest corner of the cellar. My eyes, however, never turned away from the horrible opening at the base of the chimney; and I began to get glimpses of the crumbling bricks and unhealthy weeds as faint glows of lightning penetrated the weeds outside and illumined the chinks in the upper wall. Every second I was consumed with a mixture of fear and curiosity. What would the storm call forth — or was there anything left for it to call? Guided by a lightning flash I settled myself down behind a dense clump of vegetation, through which I could see the opening without being seen.

IF HEAVEN is merciful, it will some day efface from my consciousness the sight that I saw, and let me live my last years in peace. I cannot sleep at night now, and have to take opiates when it thunders. The

thing came abruptly and unannounced; a demon, ratlike scurrying from pits remote and unimaginable, a hellish panting and stifled grunting, and then from that opening beneath the chimney a burst of multitudinous and leprous life — a loathsome night-spawned flood of organic corruption more devastatingly hideous than the blackest conjurations of mortal madness and morbidity. Seething, stewing, surging, bubbling like serpents' slime, it rolled up and out of that yawning hole, spreading like a septic contagion and streaming from the cellar at every point of egress — streaming out to scatter through the accursed midnight forests and strew fear, madness, and death.

God knows how many there were — there must have been thousands. To see the stream of them in that faint intermittent lightning was shocking. When they had thinned out enough to be glimpsed as separate organisms, I saw that they were dwarfed, deformed hairy devils or apes — monstrous and diabolic caricatures of the monkey tribe. They were so hideously silent; there was hardly a squeal when one of the last stragglers turned with the skill of long practice to make a meal in accustomed fashion on a weaker companion. Others snapped up what it left and

ate with slaving relish. Then, in spite of my daze of fright and disgust, my morbid curiosity triumphed; and as the last of the monstrosities oozed up alone from that nether world of unknown nightmare, I drew my automatic pistol and shot it under cover of the thunder.

Shrieking, slithering, torrential shadows of red viscous madness chasing one another through endless, ensanguined corridors of purple fulgurous sky . . . formless phantasms and kaleidoscopic mutations of a ghoulis, remembered scene; forests of monstrous over-nourished oaks with serpent roots twisting and sucking unnamable juices from an earth verminous with millions of cannibal devils; mound-like tentacles groping from underground nuclei of polypous perversion . . . insane lightning over malignant ivied walls and demon arcades choked with fungous vegetation . . . Heaven be thanked for the instinct which led me unconscious to places where men dwell; to the peaceful village that slept under the calm stars of clearing skies.

I HAD recovered enough in a week to send to Albany for a gang of men to blow up the Martense mansion and the entire top of Tempest Mountain with dynamite, stop up all the discoverable mound-burrows, and

destroy certain over-nourished trees whose very existence seemed an insult to sanity. I could sleep a little after they had done this, but true rest will never come as long as I remember that nameless secret of the lurking fear. The thing will haunt me, for who can say the extermination is complete, and that analogous phenomena do not exist all over the world? Who can, with my knowledge, think of the earth's unknown caverns without a nightmare dread of future possibilities? I cannot see a well or a subway entrance without shuddering . . . why cannot the doctors give me something to make me sleep, or truly calm my brain when it thunders?

What I saw in the glow of flashlight after I shot the unspeakable straggling object, was so simple that almost a minute elapsed before I understood and went delirious. The object was nauseous; a filthy whitish gorilla thing with sharp yellow fangs and matted fur. It was the ultimate product of mammalian degeneration; the frightful outcome of isolated spawning, multiplication, and cannibal nutrition above and below the ground; the embodiment of all the snarling and chaos and grinning fear that lurk behind life. It had looked at me as it died, and its eyes had the same odd quality that

marked those other eyes which had stared at me underground and excitedly cloudy recollections. One eye was blue, the other brown. They were the dissimilar Martense eyes of the

old legends, and I knew in one inundating cataclysm of voiceless horror what had become of that vanished family; the terrible and thunder-crazed house of Martense.

Whenever we have reprinted material by H. P. Lovecraft in our companion magazine, *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, we have received not only letters from readers begging us to run more material by HPL, but pleas for information as to where collections of Lovecraft material can be found. We beg the indulgence of the knowledgeable among you while we pass on the information; remember you were a newcomer once, too!

If you can afford hardcover prices, and want handsome editions, then you cannot do better than to invest in one or more of the three volumes of Lovecraft's fiction issued by Arkham House (the address is given elsewhere in this issue). These are: *The Dunwich Horror and Others*; *At the Mountains of Madness and other Novels*; and *Dagon and other Macabre Tales*.

Contents of *The Dunwich Horror and Others* are: H. P. Lovecraft and His Work, an excellent and long introduction by August Derleth; *In the Vault*; *Pickman's Model*, *The Rats in the Walls*, *The Outsider*, *The Colour out of Space*, *The Music of Erich Zann*, *The Haunter of the Dark*, *The Picture in the House*, *The Call of Cthulhu*, *The Dunwich Horror*, *Cool Air*, *The Whisperer in Darkness*, *The Terrible Old Man*, *The Thing on the Doorstep*, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, and *The Shadow out of Time*. Jacket by Lee Brown Coye; \$5.00.

(With the exception of the final two stories, both short novels, the contents of this volume have been reprinted in two soft-cover books by Lancer Books, New York at 50c each. Titles are *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, and *The Colour out of Space*. Derleth's introduction appears in the first of these.)

At The Mountains of Madness and Other Novels, contains, in addition to the title story: *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*, *The Shunned House*, *The Dreams in the Witch-House*, *The Statement of Randolph Carter*, *The Silver Key*, and *Through the Gates of the Silver Key*. Jacket by Lee Brown Coye; \$6.50.

(*The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* is also available separately in soft cover from Belmont Books.)

Lee Brown Coye also does the jacket for the third volume from Arkham House, which is priced at \$6.50 and contains the rest of the Lovecraft short stories, as well as the long essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. If you order one or more of these volumes (and we'd appreciate your mentioning STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES if this moves you to buy these books), Mr. Derleth will send you a brochure which includes information on other Lovecraft material he has in stock or is planning to publish.

The Awful Injustice

by S. B. H. Hurst

HE SAT IN the easy chair in my office, facing me, that day in 193-. The light from the window by my desk showed his strong face, his fine physique. I saw a man of forty. Never in all my years of practice in nervous and mental diseases had I seen a more worried face.

"I am Judge Romain, Doctor," he said, after a short while.

I bowed, somewhat startled, for Judge Romain was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of our neighbor State. I murmured the usual platitudes.

"And what seems to be your trouble, Judge," I asked.

The worry in his face increased, like a dark cloud crossing the sky on a dark day. I saw fear in the large gray eyes, and when he answered there was a shiver he could not inhibit.

"Doctor," he answered, "the court records do not show it, and there have been no complaints or charges against me, but — I tell you, Doctor, that I have been guilty of the most awful injustice, and the thought of what I have done is killing me; driving me insanel"

I leaned forward and took his pulse. I spoke soothingly. "Tell

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Somewhere in the shadows of the past lay the  
memory of that terrible crime . . .  
~~~~~

me all about it, very quietly. Tell me, first, when you did this injustice, and upon whom."

"My God, Doctor!" he exclaimed, "I don't know! That's the hell of it! I don't know when I did it, or who the victim was!"

I let go his wrist, then I gave him a cigar and lit one myself. I saw a case of phobia. It might be easy to relieve the judge, or it might be difficult, but in either case I believed I could do it.

"WHEN DID YOU first begin to believe you had committed an injustice?" I asked.

"Ever since I can remember I have been haunted by the belief. But it gets worse; I mean that it is driving me mad. That's why I came to you. You see, Doctor, I have never mentioned this to a soul until now. When I was a boy I was tempted to tell about it to my father, but I thought it would be silly. All these years I have kept this horror to myself — like a murderer, afraid he will be found out. My God, Doctor, I believe I *was* a murderer!"

His voice rose nearly to a scream.

"Hush! Hush!" I said sternly. "You are letting yourself go! Whatever this phobia is, it's no use losing control of yourself. Get a grip on your nerves. The entire thing could well be due to some bit of meanness when

you were a little child. You treated some playmate unkindly, and then suppressed the desire to make amends or say you were sorry. The years of suppression 'fertilized' the phobia. Had you told your father about it you would have been well now."

"But what could I have told him when I don't know what I did?" he wailed.

"Well," I answered, "you could at least have found relief in confession of general things. But never mind that now. What we have to make is an analysis. You must help me by writing down all you can remember of your dreams, and you must keep nothing back from me. When I ask you questions, answer freely and fully.

"I will soon have you well, and you will get that murder feeling out of your system. How could you have murdered anyone and then forgotten when you did it and who you killed — when you have had this fear-belief since babyhood? Babies don't murder, you know. I think this will prove a very simple case."

AT THE outset I reviewed Judge Romain's life. It was, apparently, flawless. He was not married, and his ways were the ways of one of those fine priests whose faces show their cleanliness. In this, from the medical

viewpoint, I sought the pathological, but failed to find it. Then came the obvious question: Why had he, when laboring under this feeling of having been unjust, studied law and sought, and won, the election to the judgeship?

"I felt I *had* to be a judge, Doctor," he told me simply. This, to a doctor, was indicative.

"You *felt* you had to become a judge?"

"Yes. I always felt that way. The feeling that I had to become a judge has always been with me; always — just like the feeling that I have been unjust! It is, and was, part of me! And it was surprisingly easy to gratify that feeling. The way seemed smoothed for me. I had no trouble at all winning the election to the Superior Judgeship. Then a Supreme Court judge died, and the Governor appointed me. The next election confirmed me in office. I have been a judge ever since."

Then I tried him with word tests, and I found no evasions. His time-reactions indicated no suppression; he was frank, never evasive. But through everything there was his strange obsession. He had been terribly unjust, and the sting of what he called his "sin" at times lashed him into a mild hysteria in which he called himself a murderer.

I next investigated his dreams. I say "investigated," but as a matter of fact there were no dreams to consider. The judge could never remember having a dream. He had them, of course, but they made no impression on his memory, and were lost at his waking.

All this took time, and the condition of the judge grew worse. He had to take a vacation. He was losing any faith he may have had in me, and I could hardly blame him. And with his loss of faith came an utter hopelessness. He did not believe he ever could be cured, and he was certain he was going insane. He *was* going insane. I became badly worried myself.

THEN ONE DAY he came to me with a suggestion. Like a man drowning and grasping at a straw, it seemed to me.

"You have heard of Doctor Sykes?" he asked.

"That quack?" I exclaimed contemptuously.

"Quack or not, I am going to try him," said the judge. "I have heard that he has done wonderful things. But I have also heard that he has done things he should not have done. Some people are afraid of him; they say he uses hypnotism. I am going to him, but I feel a bit afraid myself, so I want you to come with me. The man is a doctor: it's just a referred case."

Well, the judge might take that view of it, but I couldn't — for two reasons. The first was my own dislike of referring a case to a notorious quack, whose ability I considered to be much less than my own; and this involved the second, which was my own reputation and my responsibility for my patient, the judge. Not that I considered hypnotism harmful in skilled hands; in fact I have used it myself. No, it was the strange beliefs held by Doctor Sykes which, coupled with his hypnotic efforts, repelled me. Sykes had been voted out of the medical society for unethical conduct, you see.

"Better not go to Sykes," I said. "If you wish a consultation there are other mental specialists in whom I have confidence."

The voice of the judge rose in that hysteria which always came with it.

"And the other specialist will use the same methods you have used — and have the same 'success'. I want to get well, not be experimented upon like a guinea pig!"

One of the first things a doctor has to learn when he becomes a specialist in mental illness is not to be offended by anything his patients may say. They can't help it, you see. They are as unable to control their outbursts as a man is unable to

control a scream at the moment he breaks a thigh. So I merely said, "You are set upon consulting Sykes?"

"I am. But I want you with me. You see, Doctor, your reputation is assured. The lawyer in me demands credentials; but as a sick man I want to get well. This shyster may have something — and he may not be a shyster, after all. So Doctor, for God's sake come with me. You can tell Sykes what you have tried, and so save him from trying it. Forget ethics and dislikes, and think of me — me, suffering like a murderer all these years."

Well, while I hadn't the slightest faith in Sykes, I had a whole lot of sympathy for Romain. I picked up the phone, and got Sykes' number; and the upshot was that Sykes asked me to bring my patient over right away because it happened to be the only free hour he had until late in the evening. It was then about four on a dark winter afternoon. As we left my office and reached the street a cold little wind sprung up, and it whined eerily among the buildings.

I DID NOT relish the expression on Sykes' face when we arrived; I had been somewhat condemnatory in my remarks concerning him at the medical society meeting, you

see. He smiled, sarcastically it seemed. He was getting a kick at my coming: at my surrender to his ability, was the way he looked at it. I had to think of my patient to make myself comfortable when facing that smile of Sykes.

But he was politeness itself. He sat Romain down in a big easy chair facing the window. There was no high building across the street, and the view Romain had was of a cloudy evening fast getting dark, the heavy sky threatening a storm and the eery wind heralding its coming. Sykes' office was very simply furnished — just a small desk, a big chair for the patient, the desk chair and one other. There was a small portable wash basin in a corner, which I understood he used in some way in his hypnotic experiments. I told Sykes all I could about Romain's obsession, and what I had tried to do to cure it.

"It's a difficult case, Doctor," I concluded. "I have never seen one quite like it."

"I have cured a number of such cases," was Sykes' reply.

I thought he was just bragging, and smiled as sarcastically as he could have done himself.

"You see," he went on, "I permit myself a far wider field for probing than you do — a field about which — pardon my

bluntness — you know nothing. Further, you deny the existence of this field. Strange, is it not? How men of fair intelligence will admit their ignorance, and then blatantly deny the existence of a certain field of knowledge simply because they know nothing about it?"

"I have heard that you dabble in the occult," I retorted. "I have met others who did so. It is a fertile field for faking — and making money."

He laughed. "Never mind," he said. "You brought the judge to me for help — your methods having failed; so let's not fight. Your patient will walk out of this office in half an hour — cured!"

"What?"

I exclaimed the word, for the man's self confidence was stunning.

"Please do not communicate your lack of faith — and knowledge — to the judge," Sykes answered with asperity. He turned to Romain, who had been watching us and listening anxiously. "With your permission, my dear Judge, I will put you into a light sleep."

Romain looked at me. I nodded.

"A light hypnotic sleep cannot hurt you. Relax and allow Dr. Sykes to put you to sleep."

SYKES HAD PUT the basin of water by the head of the

big chair in which the judge was relaxing. I smiled. The basin looked like some sort of stage setting, the kind of thing resorted to by charlatans. I saw no need for it.

The light of the sky had gone altogether, and now Sykes snapped off the lights. I looked out of the window, which Romain was facing, and saw the angry snow clouds lashing and twisting in the wind, which had grown to a full gale. Then I turned back to the judge. Sykes was gently pressing his fingers on Romain's closed eyes, and speaking soothingly. I had to admit that he was a clever operator. He had won the judge's confidence immediately — of course he was helped by my being there — and in a few minutes Romain lay back relaxed in the deep chair, quietly sleeping. But his face had not relaxed; there was on it the same terrible worry that lurks upon the brink of the horrible swamp of insanity.

This worry, this expression of face, I could just see as I bent over the chair. Then Sykes beckoned me away, over to the window.

"We will turn our backs on him while we talk. Every little care helps," said Sykes.

So we turned our backs upon the chair and the hypnotized judge, and looked out over the

lights of the city at the growing storm.

"I should tell you," whispered Sykes, "that this 'phobia' of Romain's is *not* a matter of his late infancy. Your theory that he was unjust to a playmate is wrong. The awful sense of injustice, amounting to and indicating murder as being involved, is too great for any childhood error. No childhood emotion could leave such a terrible psychic scar. No, the scar is the result of a deliberate act of a mature man. The judge was unjust, cruel, to someone who was in his power *during a previous life on this earth!*"

I laughed.

"Please be quiet," said Sykes sternly. "If you are ignorant of the subject of reincarnation and, therefore, do not agree with me, at least be courteous about it. Buddha, Plato, the fathers of the early Christian church, countless other men of as much intelligence as yourself have endorsed the idea of reincarnation, of a long series of lives lived by every one of us. So don't act like a school-boy, but watch me prove my case."

"PROVE IT!" I said.

"Certainly! I will find out just what Judge Romain did to cause him this continued agony of remorse — and cure him. The law is the same as in other

phobias: once the patient remembers what caused the fear and misery, he becomes well. I can demonstrate to you a definite psychic metabolism; and, when I show Romain just what is hurting him, my recalling the thing to him in his hypnotized state will act upon his psyche as an emetic acts upon a stomach: he will get rid of the cause of his disturbance."

Somehow — Sykes spoke so convincingly — I ceased being sarcastic. I knew, of course, that reincarnation was rot — just a silly idea of superstitious people — but Sykes was like a clever salesman: he got my interest. I even thought that he might help Romain; although I knew that if he did, it would be by hypnosis and ordinary suggestion, and not by any bringing up of something supposed to have happened in a previous existence. Quacks always try to adopt the miraculous, you know. They appeal to ignorance and the marvelous.

"Imagine a thousand electric light poles stretching across a barren, lifeless desert," went on Sykes, "and every pole separated from the other by fifteen hundred feet. These poles stretch out into the dimming distance, and they are all out of sight of a man who is standing at the edge of the desert with a thin wire in his hand. This wire stretches from the

man's hand to the nearest pole, and from that to the next and so on; the connection is never broken. But the man lacks the power to send electricity from his hand to the first pole, let alone the others. He does not believe that there are any poles stretching across the desert, and like you, he is so myopic that he cannot see the wire he holds in his hand.

"For every pole represents a life the man has lived on earth, and the wire is his memory of those lives — if he would only learn how to use it. Though a few of us have learned, the majority deny that any wire, let alone poles, exists. Under hypnosis I will waken the memory of the judge. I will give him power to transmit along the wire to the first pole, to the second — on to the pole which represents the life during which he was murderously unjust. He will remember. Then I will awaken him — cured!"

"Sounds interesting," I admitted. "And, the way you put it, logical. But what does the desert represent, and the fifteen hundred feet between every pole?"

"The desert represents the something we call *time*, which is without life," answered Sykes. "And the distance between the poles represents roughly the time between each life on earth — which is about fifteen

hundred years. The time, however, varies widely."

HE TURNED to the judge, who was sleeping quietly.

"I will now put him into a deeper sleep," he said. "And for your benefit I will add that the practices of ordinary medical hypnotism are infantile. With the exception of myself, and one other, no doctor in America realizes the full scope of hypnosis. Watch!"

He made some passes across Romain's face. "He is now going back through time," said Sykes.

More faking! I thought, but said nothing.

Sykes continued the passes. Then I was positively startled, for Romain made little noises, exactly like a hungry baby..

"He is now in that period of his existence when his mother nursed him," said Sykes in a matter-of-fact way. "I will make a few more passes and he will pass backward out of this life altogether."

This of course, was sheer nonsense, but all the same I was greatly interested. That Romain did cease making those noises, and lay back in the chair as still as death, meant nothing, really; I mean, it did not prove that Sykes was telling the truth. For although Sykes had not audibly suggested

much, what he had said to me regarding Romain's going backward out of life might be sufficient to induce, under a skilled operator, the partial catalepsy in which he now lay.

But now Sykes was talking directly to Romain in an authoritative voice.

"Go back. Go back in memory along the silver thread that connects you with past lives. See, I give you power with which to remember! Remember when you did that unjust act which still tortures you in vague memory. Remember clearly. Enact again your crime. Remember, and be well!"

THE RESULT of this command was more than startling. It was horrible. You must remember that Romain was a grave judge of the Supreme Court; sick, of course, but still a man of self control. At Sykes' command he ceased to be that. He groaned and writhed in his chair like a man with a bullet in his abdomen.

And I saw that this was not what Doctor Sykes expected. I was filled with apprehension.

"Shall I switch on the light?" I whispered.

"No," answered Sykes in a strained voice. "To do that might kill him. Memory is electric, you know. We must work in the dark."

"Well," I answered angrily,

"he is my patient, and I don't like to see him writhe or hear him groan. You are doing no good for him. Bring him out of it!"

"My God," gasped Sykes, "I can't! He is out of my control!"

"You bungling charlatan!" I almost shouted. "Try again! Don't lose your nerve!"

I was speaking, as it were, in self-defense — trying to keep up my courage. For things terrible were happening. Not the mere groaning and twisting of Romain — such could be called *pathological*. No, it was something, something, many things — forgive me, but I can only call those other happenings *supernatural*.

The wind screamed at the window. How fast the storm had grown! And Romain was standing up, his eyes closed. As Sykes again attempted to control him the judge waved him away with a splendid gesture of authority, and Sykes reeled back to me, by the window, shivering and sweating like a frightened horse.

BUT THAT was nothing. That was mere momentary terror, mere fear at his blundering, as it seemed. The terrible, the supernatural happening was an uncanny sense of *being in a crowd*.

In a crowd. Remember, there were only the three of us in that

room, yet both Sykes and myself distinctly felt the presence of a mob — an angry howling mob. And that mob was screaming, howling, demanding — demanding something of Judge Romain. He seemed to face that mob. He seemed to have powerer he was afraid to use — because of what the mob might do. He seemed to vacillate between doing what his conscience told him to do and what the mob wanted him to do.

Was I insane? was Sykes insane? — sensing that unseen mob like that? Was the tortured Romain insane — his lips moving and uttering words in a language unknown to me — as he faced that unseen, howling mob? . . . Say we were insane, if you wish. *But it was surely not insanity that caused both Sykes and myself to bow our heads toward someone whose presence we both felt, but could not see; at the Judge's side!*

Suddenly Romain seized the wash basin that had stood at the side of the chair filled with water. He lifted it, and faced the mob. Then he put down the stand in which the basin rested. And then he faced the mob, with the basin in front of him.

I caught myself muttering, trying to reduce the tremendous drama that Romain was re-acting to terms of everyday. I muttered: "The basin of water:

that indicated mysophobia, fear of dirt; in Freudian symbolism, fear of sin."

But I knew as I said it that I merely babbled to hide my fear.

Romain put his hands in the water; he began to wash his hands. I looked at Sykes; he was very pale.

"Doctor," he whispered, "we have both been humbled to-day. You came to me, arrogantly looking upon me as a charlatan, but I was no less arrogant at your ignorance and my own pride in asserting that I could heal this man before knowing the truth merits more humiliation than does your lesser ignorance. . . . I can do nothing for this man."

"What . . ." I began, but Sykes put up his hand. "Listen . . . he is about to speak. It will be a language we both know, but not English."

And, despite the different pronunciation of the words, I recognized the language. And then I knew! For Romain had said: "I am innocent of the blood of this Just Person; see ye to it!"

The mob howled joyfully.

And Sykes trembled at my side. "You see," he whispered. "He was Pilate — Pontius Pilate! This is the source of his sense of murder, of awful injustice.

"I can do nothing for him. He cannot get well, for remembering what he did will only make him worse!"



Ferguson's Capsules

by August Derleth

IN A SENSE, I suppose, Hiram Ferguson was my own discovery. That is, it is doubtful whether Harrigan would have been able to add him to his collection of queer people if I had not heard about Ferguson and passed on the word to him one evening in a Madison Street bar.

"Ever hear of a fellow named Hiram Ferguson?" I asked him.

"Doesn't ring any bells in my head," said Harrigan.

"Seems to be in your line, Tex. He's by way of being a

medical man, if I understand him correctly."

"You've seen him?"

"No. A friend of mine told me about him. Fellow named Cobbett. I saw him two days ago with his dog. It's the dog that's important. I looked him over and said I thought he had been larger when last I had seen him. He had, said Cobbett, but Ferguson had made him smaller, bones and all. He talked about Ferguson and made him sound like a harmless crank of a doctor given to experimenting

The array of shoes and other clothing all
pointed to . . .

with pills and nostrums. What struck me was Ferguson's reducing technique. Seems Ferguson has some sort of capsule which guarantees a reduction in size — an overall reduction."

"Where do they get those whacky ideas?" asked Harrigan. "Where can I get hold of him?"

I told him.

"Next time I'm out that way I'll look him up."

TWO WEEKS later I saw Harrigan again. He began to talk about Ferguson right away.

"Look, you remember that fellow Ferguson you told me about? Well, I got around to looking him up. He certainly belongs in my file: a first-class character. I walked in on him a week ago. He's got a little office and a laboratory adjoining, both part of his house. Lives alone and can't have much of a practice. When I got in, I didn't take the shabby old fellow for my quarry, at first.

"I'm looking for a Dr. Ferguson," I said. "Dr. Hiram Ferguson."

"I'm Dr. Ferguson," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I came to see you about losing some weight. I understand you've got a reducing agent no one else can offer."

"He looked at me out of his pale eyes, unblinking, trying to make up his mind whether I was reliable. 'It's not supposed

to get out,' he said at last. 'It's still in the experimental stage. I couldn't give it to anyone until I'd tried it.'

"I understood you tried it on a friend's dog."

"Yes. Shrank the dog."

"Bones and all?"

"Bones and all," he said solemnly.

"Little by little, I drew some sort of story out of him. He had begun experimenting years before. His goal was not a reducing capsule at all; it was an all-purpose pill — one of those pills which are equally good for headaches, stomachaches, leg pains, fever, cold, and anything you can think of. One of those far-fetched dreams that quacks sometimes get."

"Is he a quack?" I put in. "I thought he was a registered M. D."

"Oh, he is, all right; there's no question about that. I looked him up. He interned in Chicago, went to school at Rush and two other colleges. Had a good scholastic record. Went into general practice and made no attempt at specialization. As far as I could find out, he always dabbled in nostrums, though. Back in 1920, he had a new kind of corn-plaster; two years later, it was a headache powder. In 1927, he offered a lumbago cure, and for a while he was making good money with a kind of diluted prune juice liberally laced

with herbs which was supposed to be a sure cure for stomach aches.

"I wasn't interested in anything but his reducing medicine. It came in a capsule, and he himself described it as 'highly dangerous'.

"I wouldn't dare prescribe it, Mr. Harrigan," he said in answer to my request. "Besides, what's to prevent your having it analyzed? And then my secret would be out before I could get protection by patent."

"Okeh," I said. "Tell me about it."

"He was reluctant. Queer fish; they all are. Yet, given a chance and they tell all. He came out with it in time. He had begun, as I said, with the idea for an all-purpose pill with curative powers. One day his cat had come in after a brawl, badly clawed and limping with a wound in one paw. On impulse, he had given her some of the powder he had made.

"Well, he had watched the cat for a few days before he got the oddest feeling that she had grown smaller. Not just thinner, but also smaller. Her wounds had healed, but not, he thought, any faster than they normally would have healed. He couldn't rid himself of the conviction that the cat was smaller.

"It took him a week to come to the conclusion that his pill had had something to do with

it, so he gave her another dose. This time there was no doubt; the cat reduced to about half size, all over. The dose, though, must have been too large, for it killed the cat. Since then he had tried it on others, and learned that smaller doses were not, apparently, lethal.

"When he had finished, I said, 'I'm sorry, Doctor, but I couldn't buy that.'

"It's not for sale," he said quickly.

"No, I meant I couldn't swallow it."

"Oh, I see," he said. "You sound like a newspaperman. Are you?"

"I confessed that I was.

"If you print anything about this, I'll deny it."

"I don't intend to," I said. "I'm just curious for myself."

"Well, the upshot of it was that I was promised a demonstration. He went out and came in with a glossy-coated orange cat. It was a Tom, of good size.

"Suppose you measure it," said Ferguson.

"I did that, as best I could.

"So then he gave the cat a little capsule filled with white powder. The cat fought against it, but it never had a chance; the doctor simply forced the capsule down the cat's throat and made sure the cat wouldn't regurgitate it until it had escaped the capsule inside.

"'Come back in four days, Mr. Harrigan,' he said, and that was it."

"You said a week ago," I said. "You went back then?"

"I went back, yes. He remembered me at once and went out for the orange cat."

"Measure it, Mr. Harrigan," he said.

"Well, I went through that ordeal again. If it was the same cat, it was smaller, all right. An inch in length had gone, considerable weight, and also about an inch in height. A uniform reduction."

"What do you mean — 'the same cat'?" I put in.

"Look, orange cats aren't so uncommon that Ferguson couldn't have planted a substitution on me. It looked like the same cat; it acted like the same cat; but it was undeniably smaller than the cat I'd looked at and measured four days previously. So either I have to admit that this fellow has done something which, by all the laws of biology, is absolutely impossible, or else I've been hoaxed. It's simply easier to believe the latter, isn't it? I'd be laughed out of any scientific gathering if I came out with a story like that!"

"My friend Cobbett seemed to believe him. It was *his* dog, after all."

"Sure, sure, but he's hardly a qualified observer."

"Well, that's that," I said.

"Hold on. I haven't given the old boy up yet. I didn't tell him what was going through my mind, and he was all ready to give the cat another capsule. Far be it from me to stop the progress of science or hoax, whichever it might turn out to be. I'm due back there in a couple of days."

THREE DAYS LATER Harrigan telephoned me.

"Ferguson's got that cat down to kitten size now," he said.

"I see," I said. "Does it act like a kitten?"

"No."

"You're still skeptical?"

"Hell, yes; the thing's impossible. Is there anything to prevent his having cats of all sizes around? Nothing whatever. Just the same, he's got a new wrinkle this time. He's ready to experiment on a human being."

"Not me," I said to him.

"I hadn't thought of you, Mr. Harrigan," he came back. "A pioneer in this kind of research will experiment on himself first."

"And just that quick he took a capsule of the stuff."

"Try me in a week, Mr. Harrigan," he said.

"You mean he took the stuff himself?" I asked.

Harrigan chuckled. "Let's say he took a capsule of something. It might have been sugar or flour. I didn't sample it or ana-

lyze it, and he wasn't giving out even a pinch of it to risk analysis, either. So he took something and I saw him do it. That's as far as the cagey old boy went."

"And the cat?" I asked.

"Well, the cat — or cats, whichever the case might be — seems to be alive and happy. I didn't expect it — or them — to be anything else."

WHEN NEXT I saw Harrigan, he struck me as unusually grave.

He had made another visit to Dr. Ferguson.

"I admit it was almost three weeks since I'd seen him take that capsule," he said. "And I know of cases where a pound a day has been lost under rigorous diet."

"Ferguson had lost weight?"

"Quite a bit of it; more than a pound a day. His clothes hung on him. Still, he looked quite healthy. His eyes sparkled, and he seemed exceptionally exhilarated. Almost gay."

"You see me, Mr. Harrigan," he said. "How do I look?"

"Smaller," I said.

"I've lost forty-two pounds."

"You look it," I said.

"Also," he went on, "I'm a good two inches shorter."

"Pity I didn't measure you," I said.

"Trouble was, he *looked* shorter. It may have been the reduction in weight and the way his

clothes hung on him, but I couldn't get rid of the feeling that he looked shorter than he had seemed before. Illusions of that kind are common enough, and, I'll admit I didn't examine him very carefully. I can't say he *was* two inches shorter. There wasn't any evidence of trickery; I looked for that. You know what I mean — built-up or built-down shoes, that sort of thing. After all, he might have been falsely tall at first, and just come down to natural size to further his little joke.

"I'm afraid you're a profound skeptic, Mr. Harrigan," Ferguson said.

"I said, yes, I was, and who could blame me? — all the whacks I've had to deal with. He didn't seem to mind."

"We all tend to look with doubt on every new thing. Just think of some of the inventions of the past, with what jeers and doubts they were greeted! Even after the proof was virtually unassailable, there were still those in responsible positions who doubted the evidence of their own senses."

"What now?" I wanted to know.

"There will be further experiments, of course, Mr. Harrigan. First I must wait on the possible after-effects. Every new drug — consider the anti-biotics, for instance — is potentially cap-

able of adding unpleasant after-effects.'

"What about the cats?" I asked.

"I was coming to that. The orange cat has developed a stiffness of the joints. Quite possibly the powder has an aging effect. We shall see. As for me, I have already determined that the dosage I've been using is too little. What you see before you is the result of three doses. I hesitate to experiment with larger doses, since the stuff is so infernally tricky, but there seems to be no alternative."

"Just what are the possibilities?"

"Of danger?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Harrigan, I've already mentioned the aging process. It may be that this is accelerated. Then there is a possibility of calcification. Two of my cats died; both showed a remarkable stiffening, which seemed to be more than rigor mortis. This interesting development should have been further investigated, I concede, but time is always limited, Mr. Harrigan, and I am more interested in the positive results of my capsules than I am in the possible negative after-effects, which will show up in due time."

"Haven't you proved the case for your capsules already?" I asked.

"Have I proved it to you?" When I did not answer, he said, "I see I haven't. That should be your answer, Mr. Harrigan. If you suspect some kind of hoax, please feel free to make any kind of examination or investigation you wish. I recognize that my assurance will offer you nothing of the proof you want."

"He sounded sincere; but then, they all do. All that I could say beyond cavil was that he had most certainly lost weight. He had about him a suggestion of having shrunk together, which might have been conveyed very easily by his clothes."

"What do you propose to do?" I asked. "You're still seeing Ferguson?"

"When I can, yes. Right now, though, I'd like a little talk with that friend of yours. Cobbett, I think you said his name was."

I GAVE HARRIGAN Cobbett's address, and Harrigan lost no time in getting over there. It was, in any case, only three blocks from the Club.

I was still at the Club when Harrigan got back an hour later.

"That friend of yours swears his dog was almost twice his size before the change," he said thoughtfully. "He showed me a photograph of him, before and after."

"You saw the dog?"

"No, the dog's dead. Died two weeks ago. Just got old. 'Hardened up', your friend put it."

"Well, there's your evidence," I said.

Harrigan shook his head sourly. "Hell, you know that's not evidence. If I tried to get into print with that, I'd get my walking papers. Anybody can produce two photographs and who's to know they're of the same dog? Dogs run pretty much the same, given the same breed. All collies look pretty much alike, all scotties ditto, allowing for size and color change. So I saw photographs; they might have been of the same dog or of two different dogs. I can't tell. I have to take Cobbett's word, and nobody's word is scientific evidence; you know that, and so does the public."

"So it goes straight back to Ferguson."

"It does."

Harrigan sat looking thoughtfully out at the lake. I did not interrupt his train of thought.

"What will I have to write if I find Ferguson cut down to half his size?" he said at last. "The reaction will be about the same — photographs before and after; the testimony of those who have known Ferguson. But then, there must be measurements of him somewhere — in college, and so on. We'll see what comes of it. But I confess

I'm still pretty sure there's a catch in it somewhere."

"The trouble with you, Harrigan, is that you're conditioned to iconoclasm."

"The trouble with me is that I've seen too many whacks, hoaxers, and downright frauds operating on every level of our civilization. Maybe I've got a blind spot, but I prefer to think I've got the sense of true scientific inquiry — I want proof, proof incontrovertible. Is that asking too much?"

IT WAS ABOUT a month later that Harrigan tracked me down at a concert and had me called to the telephone. He was still on Ferguson's track.

"Tell me, has your friend Cobbett seen anything more of Ferguson?"

"How should I know? Why don't you call Cobbett?"

"I tried. Twice. Couldn't get him."

"Have you tried Ferguson?"

"Why in hell do you think I'm trying to contact Cobbett?"

Two days later there was a sequel to this telephone call in the morning papers. Ferguson's picture looked dourly out of the papers, topping a brief story setting forth that the doctor had vanished. "Apparently all he took with him were certain valuable formulae," Harrigan had written.

I got hold of Harrigan at his

desk and invited him out to dinner.

"What's the dope on Ferguson?" I wanted to know as soon as he sat down.

"I wish I knew, but I'm afraid he's decamped."

"Decamped"? With what? You suggest he took along only his own formulae. I like those pat explanations of yours, Tex. What's his motive for decamping?"

"Perhaps he was afraid I might expose him."

"Could you?"

Harrigan looked uncomfortable. "To tell the truth, I don't know. I finally got into his place with a cop. I don't know how many suspicious circumstances a man has to encounter before something is looked into. Nobody seemed to notice the milk collected on the stoop — except whoever it was stole some of it — nor the mail crammed in the box. Nothing. He was gone."

"In regard to his hoax, one interesting note. The house was filled with cats. All sizes. Some of them were dead. I couldn't say whether they had died of starvation or just died. They were stiff and cold as stone, anyway. But get the fact that they were all sizes, which bears out what I said about the possibility of Ferguson's substituting one size for another from visit to visit in the hope of taking me in."

"You could read that either way, couldn't you?" I asked.

"Why strain credibility? It's much more likely to believe in substitution."

"Oh, sure," I said. "Only, while I never saw Ferguson or his cats, I did see Cobbett's dog. Before and after. I'm convinced it was the same dog."

"Because you want to be."

"Okeh, have it your way. What about Ferguson?"

"There was no sign of him, but there was every evidence to show that he meant to carry his hoax to completion. For instance, in his wardrobe we found hasty alterations in his clothes; the cuffs of his trousers and of his sleeves had been turned back and pinned up — to suggest that he was shrinking inside them. He had two pairs of new shoes, each one size smaller than the other, and both several sizes smaller than most of his old, worn shoes we found. There was some new underclothing, too."

"Curiously, there was everything to show that, far from taking off, the old boy had just got ready to go to bed. His clothes were folded over a chair next to his bed. There was even an indentation in the bed, as if a man, somewhat shorter than I recalled Ferguson to be — you'll remember I hadn't been able to get around there for a month or more — had lain there."

"What was in the bed was clinching evidence that Ferguson had been planning some sort of shocker at the end."

He turned to look for the wine bottle.

I handed it to him. "What was it?" I asked.

"A stone figure, about a foot high — calcified, the police said — a perfect reproduction in every respect of Ferguson himself. A ring Ferguson habitually

wore was loose at its fingertips."

I refused to speak of the possibility which immediately suggested itself to me. Instead, I asked, "What are the police doing about Ferguson?"

"Sending out the usual circular. Don't worry — sooner or later he'll turn up for some of his mail and the royalties he still gets on some of his patents. He can't stay in hiding forever; he'll be found."

But, of course, he never was.



"Mr. Larkins was distinctly not a believer in any form of the supernatural. For some time he sat very still, listening. The sound seemed to be that of a man pacing to and fro in a narrow space; Mr. Larkins had a mental picture of the closed room. The pacing was not, however, very regular; it was punctuated at odd intervals by a furious pounding sound — as if the tenant were hammering on the door or the walls, reflected the author. Usually such an interval was followed by a curious padding sound, as if the tenant were running in a circle around the room. Eventually this resolved into the steady pacing which became to Mr. Larkins, more and more monotonous as he sat there listening."

What was the secret of the apparently empty closed room in a mansion that an author had rented in order to work in privacy? August Derleth relates the entire grisly account in *The Pacer*, which you will find in the November 1964 issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*; copies are still available at 50c, postpaid, from Health Knowledge, Inc., 119 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10003.

The Mansion of Unholy Magic

by Seabury Quinn

"CAR, SIR? Take you anywhere you want to go."

It was a quaint-looking figure which stood before us on the railway station platform, that day in the autumn of 193-, a figure difficult to classify as to age, status, or even sex. A man's gray felt hat which had seen better days, though not recently, was perched upon a head of close-cropped, tightly curling

blond hair, surmounting a face liberally strewn with freckles. A pullover sweater of gray cardigan sheathed boyishly broad shoulders and boyishly narrow hips and waist, while the straight, slim legs were encased in a pair of laundry-faded jodhpurs of cotton corduroy. A pair of bright pink coral ear-drops completed the ensemble.

Jules de Grandin eased the

The centuries - dead return to frightful life
and require their due.

strap by which his triple-barreled Knaak combination gun swung from his left shoulder and favored the solicitor with a look denoting compound interest. "A car?" he echoed. "But no, I do not think we need one. The motor stage . . ."

"The bus isn't running," the other interrupted. "They had an accident this afternoon and the driver broke his arm; so I ran over to see if I could pick up any passengers. I've got my car here, and I'll be glad to take you where you want to go — if you'll hurry."

"But certainly," the Frenchman agreed with one of his quick smiles. "We go to Monsieur Sutter's hunting-lodge. You know the way?"

A vaguely troubled look clouded the clear gray eyes regarding him as he announced our destination. "Sutter's lodge," the girl — by now I had determined that it was a girl — repeated as she cast a half-calculating, half-fearful glance at the lengthening lines of red and orange which streaked the western sky. "Oh, all right; I'll take you there, but we'll have to hurry. I don't want to — come on, please."

She led the way to a travel-stained Model T Ford touring-car, swung open the tonneau door and climbed nimbly to the driving-seat.

"All right?" she asked across

her shoulder, and ere we had a chance to answer put the ancient vehicle in violent motion, charging down the unkempt country road as though she might be driving for a prize.

"*Eh bien*, my friend, this is a singularly unengaging bit of country," de Grandin commented as our rattling chariot proceeded at breakneck speed along a road which became progressively worse. "At our present pace I estimate that we have come five miles, yet not one single habitation have we passed, not a ray of light or wreath of smoke have we seen, nor . . ." he broke off, grasping at his cap as the almost springless car catapulted itself across a particularly vicious hummock in the road.

"*Desist, ma belle chauffeuse*," he cried. "We desire to sleep together in one piece tonight; but one more bump like that and . . ." he clutched at the car-side while the venerable flivver launched itself upon another aerial excursion.

"Mister," our driver turned her serious, uncompromising face upon us while she drove her foot still harder down on the accelerator, "this is no place to take your time. We'll all be lucky to sleep in bed tonight, I'm thinkin', in one piece or several, if I don't . . ."

"Look out, girl!" I shouted, for the car, released from her

guiding hand while she answered de Grandin's complaint, had lurched across the narrow roadway and was headed for a great, black-boled pine which grew beside the trail. With a wrench she brought the vehicle once more to the center of the road, putting on an extra burst of speed as she did so.

"If we ever get out of this," I told de Grandin through chattering teeth, "I'll never trust myself to one of these modern young fools' driving, you may be . . ."

"If we *émergé* from this with nothing more than *Mademoiselle's* driving to trouble us, I think we shall be more lucky than I think," he cut in seriously.

"What d'ye mean," I asked exasperated. "If . . ."

"If you will look behind us, perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what it is you see," he interrupted, as he began unfastening the buckles of his gun-case.

"Why," I answered as I glanced across the lurching car's rear cushion, "it's a man, de Grandin. A running man."

"Eh, you are sure?" he answered, slipping a heavy cartridge into the rifle barrel of his gun. "A man who runs like that?"

The man was certainly running with remarkable speed. Tall, almost gigantic in height,

and dressed in some sort of light-colored stuff which clung to his spare figure like a suit of tights, he covered the ground with long, effortless strides reminiscent of a hound upon the trail. There was something oddly furtive in his manner, too, for he did not keep to the center of the road, but dodged in a sort of zigzag, swerving now right, now left, keeping to the shadows as much as possible and running in such manner that only for the briefest intervals was he in direct line with us without some bush or tree-trunk intervening.

De GRANDIN nursed the forestock of his gun in the crook of his left elbow, his narrowed eyes intent upon the runner.

"When he comes within fifty yards I shall fire," he told me softly. "Perhaps I should shoot now, but . . ."

"Good heavens, man; that's murder!" I expostulated. "If . . ."

"Be still!" he told me in a low, sharp whisper. "I know what I am doing."

The almost nighttime darkness of the dense pine woods through which we drove was thinning rapidly, and as we neared the open land the figure in our wake seemed to redouble its efforts. Now it no longer skulked along the edges of the road, but sprinted boldly down the center of the trail, arms

flailing wildly, hands outstretched as though to grasp the rear of our car.

Amazingly the fellow ran. We were going at a pace exceeding forty miles an hour; but this long, thin woodsman seemed to be outdistancing us with ease. As we neared the margin of the wood and came into the dappled lights and shadows of the sunset, he put on a final burst of speed and rushed forward like a whirlwind, his feet scarce seeming to touch the ground.

Calmly, deliberately, de Grandin raised his gun and sighted down its gleaming blue-steel barrels.

"No!" I cried, striking the muzzle upward as he squeezed the trigger. "You can't do that, de Grandin; it's murder!"

My gesture was in time to spoil his aim, but not in time to stop the shot. With a roar the gun went off and I saw a tree-limb crack and hurtle downward as the heavy bullet sheared it off. And, as the shot reverberated through the autumn air, drowning the rattling of our rushing flivver, the figure in our wake dissolved. Astonishingly, inexplicably, but utterly, it vanished in the twinkling of an eye, gone completely — and as instantly — as a soap-bubble pictured with a pin.

The screeching grind of tortured brakes succeeded, and our

car bumped to a stop within a dozen feet. "D-did you shoot?" our driver asked tremulously. Her fair and sunburned face had gone absolutely corpse-gray with terror, making the golden freckles stand out with greater prominence, and her lips were blue and cyanotic.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle*, I shot," de Grandin answered in a low and even voice. "I shot, and had it not been for my kind and empty-headed friend, I should have scored a hit." He paused. then, lower still, he added: "And now one understands why you were in a hurry, *Mademoiselle*."

"Th-then, you saw — you saw . . ." she began through trembling lips, plucked feverishly at the steering-wheel with fear-numbed fingers for a moment, then, with a little, choking, gasping moan, slumped forward in her seat, unconscious.

"*Parbleu*, now one can sympathize with that Monsieur Crusoe," the little Frenchman murmured as he looked upon the fainting girl. "Here we are, a dozen miles from anywhere, with most unpleasant neighbors all about, and none to show us to our destination." Matter-of-factly he fell to chafing the girl's wrists, slapping her cheeks softly from time to time, massaging her brow with deft, practised fingers.

"Ah, so, you are better now, *n'est-ce pas?*" he asked as her

eyelids fluttered upward. "You can show us where to go if my friend will drive the car?"

"Oh, I can drive all right, I think," she answered shakily, "but I'd be glad if you would sit by me."

Less speedily, but still traveling at a rate which seemed to me considerably in excess of that which our decrepit car could make with safety, we took up our journey, dipping into desolate, uninhabited valleys, mounting rocky elevations, finally skirting an extensive growth of evergreens and turning down a narrow, tree-lined lane until we reached the Sutter lodge, a squat, substantial log house with puncheon doors and a wide chimney of fieldstone. The sun had sunk below the western hills and long, purple-gray shadows were reaching across the little clearing around the cabin as we came to halt before the door.

"How much?" de Grandin asked as he clambered from the car and began unloading our gear.

"Oh, two dollars," said the girl as she slid down from the driving-seat and bent to lift a cowskin bag. "The bus would have brought you over for a dollar, but they'd have let you down at the foot of the lane, and you'd have had to lug your duffle up here. Besides . . ."

"Perfectly, *Mademoiselle*," he interrupted, "we are not dis-

posed to dicker over price. Here is five dollars, and you need not trouble to make change; neither is it necessary that you help us with our gear; we are quite content to handle it ourselves, and . . ."

"Oh, but I want to help you," she broke in, staggering toward the cabin with the heavy bag. "Then, if there's anything I can do to make you comfortable . . ." She broke off, puffing with exertion, set the bag down on the door-sill and hastened to the car for another burden.

Our traps stored safely in the cabin, we turned once more to bid our guide adieu, but she shook her head. "It's likely to be cold tonight," she told us. "This fall weather's right deceptive after dark. Better let me bring some wood in, and then you'll be needing water for your coffee and washing in the morning. So . . ."

"No, *Mademoiselle*, you need not do it," Jules de Grandin protested as she came in with an armful of cut wood. "We are able-bodied men, and if we find ourselves in need of wood or water we can — *mordieu!*"

Somewhere, faint and far-off seeming, but growing in intensity till it seemed to make our very eardrums ache, there rose the quavering, mournful howling of a dog, such a slowly rising and diminishing lament as hounds are wont to make at

night when baying at the moon — or when bemoaning death in the family of their master. And, like an echo of the canine yowling, almost like an orchestrated part of some infernal symphony, there came from very near a little squeaking, skirking noise, like the squealing of a hollow rubber toy or the gibbering of an angry monkey. Not one small voice, but half a dozen, ten, a hundred of the chattering things seemed passing through the woodland at the clearing's edge, marching in a sort of disorderly array, hurrying, tumbling, rushing toward some rendezvous, and gabbling as they went.

The firewood clattered to the cabin floor, and once again the girl's tanned face went pasty-gray.

"Mister," she told de Grandin solemnly, "this is no place to leave your house o' nights, for wood or water or anything else."

The little Frenchman tweaked the needle points of his mustache as he regarded her. Then: "O ne understands, *Mademoiselle* — in part, at least," he answered. "We thank you for your kindness, but it is growing late; soon it will be dark. I do not think we need detain you longer."

Slowly the girl walked toward the door, swung back the sturdy rough-hewn panels, and gazed into the night. The sun had sunk and deep-blue darkness spread

across the hills and woods; here and there an early star winked down, but there was no hint of other light, for the moon was at the dark. A moment she stood thus upon the sill, then, seeming to take sudden resolution, slammed the door and turned to face us, jaw squared, but eyes suffused with hot tears of embarrassment.

"I can't," she announced; then, as de Grandin raised his brows interrogatively: "I'm afraid — scared to go out there. Will — will you let me spend the night here?"

"Here?" the Frenchman echoed.

"Yes, sir; here. I—I *daren't* go out there among those gibbering things. I can't. I can't; I *can't*!"

De Grandin laughed delightedly. "*Morbleu*, but prudery dies hard in you Americans, *Mademoiselle*," he chuckled; "despite your boasted modernism and emancipation. No matter, you have asked our hospitality, and you shall have it. You did not really think that we would let you go among those — those whatever-they-may-bes, I hope? But no. Here you shall stay till daylight makes your going safe, and when you have eaten and rested you shall tell us all you know of this strange business of the monkey. Yes, of course."

As he knelt to light the fire he threw me a delighted wink.

"When that so kind Monsieur Sutter invited us to use his lodge for hunting we little suspected what game we were to hunt, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he asked.

II

COFFEE, fried bacon, pancakes and a tin of preserved peaches constituted dinner. De Grandin and I ate with the healthy appetite of tired men, but our guest was positively ravenous, passing her plate for replenishment again and again. At last, when we had filled the seemingly bottomless void within her and I had set my pipe aglow while she and Jules de Grandin lighted cigarettes, the little Frenchman prompted. "And now, *Mademoiselle?*"

"I'm glad you saw something in Putnam's woods and heard those things squeaking in the dark outside tonight," she answered. "It'll make it easier for you to believe me." She paused a moment, then:

"Did you notice the white house in the trees just before we came here?" she demanded.

We shook our heads, and she went on, without pausing for reply:

"That's Colonel Putnam's place, where it all started. My dad is postmaster and general storekeeper at Bartlesville, and Putnam's mail used to be delivered through our office. I was

graduated from high school last year, and went to help Dad in the store, sometimes giving him a lift with the letters, too. I remember, it was in the afternoon of the twenty-third of June a special delivery parcel came for Colonel Putnam, and Dad asked me if I'd like to drive him over to deliver it after supper. We could make the trip in an hour, and Dad and Colonel Putnam had been friends since boyhood; so he wanted to do him the favor of getting the package to him as soon as possible.

"Folks had started telling some queer tales about Colonel Putnam, even then, but Dad pooh poohed 'em all. You see, the colonel was the richest man in the county, and lived pretty much to himself since he came back here from Germany. He'd gone to school in that country as a young man, and went back on trips every year or so until about twenty years ago, when he married a Bavarian lady and settled there. His wife, we heard, died two years after they were married, when their little girl was born; then, just before the War, the daughter was drowned in a boating accident and Colonel Putnam came back to his old ancestral home and shut himself in from everybody, an old, broken and embittered man. I'd never seen him, but Dad had been to call once, and said he seemed a little touched in

the head. Anyway, I was glad of the chance to see the old fellow when Dad suggested we drive over with the parcel.

"There was something queer about the Putnam house — something I didn't like, without actually knowing what it was. You know, just as you might be repelled by the odor of tuberoses, even though you didn't realize their connection with funerals and death? The place seemed falling apart; the drive was overgrown with weeds, the lawns all gone to seed, and a general air of desolation everywhere.

"There didn't seem to be any servants, and Colonel Putnam let us in himself. He was tall and spare, almost cadaverous, with white hair and beard, and wore a long, black, double-breasted frock coat and a stiff white-linen collar tied with a black stock. At first he hardly seemed to know Dad, but when he saw the parcel we brought, his eyes lighted up with what seemed to me a kind of fury.

" 'Come in, Hawkins,' he invited; 'you and your daughter are just in time to see a thing which no one living ever saw before.'

"He led us down a long and poorly lighted hall, furnished in old-fashioned walnut and haircloth, to a larger apartment overlooking his weed-grown back yard.

" 'Hawkins,' he told my father, 'you're in time to witness a demonstration of the unconvertible truth of the Pythagorean doctrine — the doctrine of metempsychosis.'

" 'Good Lord, Henry, you don't mean to say you believe such non . . .' Dad began, but Colonel Putnam looked at him so fiercely that I thought he'd spring on him.

" 'Silence, impious fool!' he shouted. 'Be silent and witness the exemplification of the Truth!' Then he calmed down a little, though he still continued walking up and down the room, twitching his eyebrows, shrugging his shoulders and snapping his fingers every now and then.

" 'Just before I came back to this country,' he went on, 'I met a master of the occult, a Herr Doktor von Meyer, who is not only the seventh son of a seventh son, but a member of the forty-ninth generation in direct descent from the Master Magician, Simon of Tyre. He possesses the ability to remember incidents in his former incarnations as you and I recall last night's dreams in the morning, Hawkins. Not only that: he has the power of reading other people's pasts. I sat with him in his *atelier* in Leipzig and saw my whole existence, from the time I was an insensate ameba crawling in the pri-

mordial slime to the minute of my birth in this life, pass before me like the episodes of a motion picture.'

" 'Did he tell you anything of this life; relate any incident of your youth known only to yourself, for instance, Henry?' Father asked him.

" 'Be careful, scoffer, the Powers know how to deal with unbelievers such as you!' Colonel Putnam answered, flushing with rage, then calmed down again and resumed pacing the floor.

" 'Back in the days when civilization was in the first flush of its youth,' he told us, 'I was a priest of Osiris' in a temple by the Nile. And she, my darling, my dearest daughter, orphaned then as later, was a priestess in the temple of the Mother Goddess, Isis, across the river from my sanctuary.

" 'But even in that elder day the fate which followed us was merciless. Then as later, water was the medium which was to rob me of my darling, for one night when her service to the Divine Mother was ended and temple slaves were rowing her across the river to my house, an accident overturned her boat, and she, the apple of my doting eyes, was thrown from her couch and drowned in the waters of Nilus. Drowned, drowned in the Egyptian river

even as her latest earthly body was drowned in the Rhine.'

"COLONEL PUTNAM stopped before my father, and his eyes were fairly blazing as he shook his finger in Dad's face and whispered:

" 'But von Meyer told me how to overcome my loss, Hawkins. By his supernatural powers he was able to project his memory backward through the ages to the rock-tomb where they had laid the body of my darling, the very flesh in which she walked the streets of hundred-gated Thebes when the world was young. I sought it out, together with the bodies of those who served her in that elder life, and brought them here to my desolated house. Behold . . .'

" 'With a sort of dancing step he crossed the room and swept aside a heavy curtain. There, in the angle of the wall, with vases of fresh-cut flowers before them, stood three Egyptian mummy cases.

" 'It is she!' Colonel Putnam whispered tensely. 'It is she, my own little daughter, in her very flesh, and these' — he pointed to the other two — 'were her attendants in that former life.

" 'Look!' He lifted the lid from the center coffin and revealed a slender form closely wrapped in overlying layers of

dust-colored linen. "There she stands, exactly as the priestly craftsman wrapped her for her long, long rest, three thousand years ago! Now all is prepared for the great work I purpose; only the contents of that parcel you brought were needed to call the spirits of my daughter and her servants back to their earthly tenements, here, tonight, in this very room, Hawkins!"

" 'Henry Putnam,' my father cried, 'do you mean to say you intend to play with this Devil's business? You'd really try to call back the spirit of one whose life on earth is done?'

" 'I would; by God, *I will!*' Colonel Putnam shouted.

" 'You shan't!' Father told him. 'That kind of thing is denounced by the laws of Moses, and mighty good sense he showed when he forbade it, too!'

" 'Fool!' Colonel Putnam screamed at him. 'Don't you know Moses stole all his knowledge from the priesthood of Egypt, to which I belonged? Centuries before Moses was, we knew the white arts of life and the black arts of death. Moses! How dare you quote that ignorant charlatan and thief?'

" 'Well, I'll have no part in any such Devil's mummery,' Father told him, but Colonel Putnam was like a madman.

" 'You shall!' he answered, drawing a revolver from his pocket. 'If either of you tries to leave this room I'll shoot him dead!'

The girl stopped speaking and covered her face with her hands. 'If we'd only let him shoot us!' she said wearily. "Maybe we'd have been able to stop it."

De Grandin regarded her compassionately. "Can you continue, *Mademoiselle*?" he asked gently. "Or would you, perhaps, wait till later?"

"No, I might as well get it over with," she answered with a sigh. "Colonel Putnam ripped the cover off the package Father had brought and took out seven little silver vessels, each about as large as a hen's egg, but shaped something like a pineapple — having a pointed top and a flat base. He set them in a semicircle before the three coffins and filled them from an earthenware jug which was fitted with a spout terminating in a knob fashioned like a woman's head crowned with a diadem of hawks' wings. Then he lighted a taper and blew out the oil-lamp which furnished the only illumination for the room.

"It was deathly still in the darkened room; outside we could hear the crickets cheeping, and their shrill little cries seemed to grow louder and

louder, to come closer and closer to the window. Colonel Putnam's shadow, cast by the flickering taper's light, lay on the wall like one of those old-time pictures of the Evil One.

"The hour!" he breathed. "The hour has come!"

"Quickly he leaned forward, touching first one, then another of the little silver jars with the flame of his taper.

"The room's darkness yielded to an eery, bluish glow. Wherever the fire came in contact with a vase a tiny, thin, blue flame sprang up.

"Suddenly, the corner of the room where the mummy-cases stood seemed wavering and rocking, like a ship upon a troubled ocean. It was hot and sultry in that house, shut in as it was by the thick pine woods, but from somewhere a current of cold — freezing cold! — air began to blow. I could feel its chill on my hands as I held them in my lap.

"Daughter, little daughter — daughter in all the ages past and all the ages yet to be, I call to you. Come, your father calls!" Colonel Putnam intoned in a quavering voice. "Come. Come, I command it! Out of the illimitable void of eternity, come to me. In the name of Osiris, Dread Lord of the Spirit World, I command it. In the name of Isis, wife and sister of the Mighty One, I command

it! In the names of Horus and Anubis, I command it!"

"Something — I don't know what — seemed entering the room. The windows were light-latched; yet we saw the dusty curtains flutter, as though in a sudden current of air, and a light, fine mist seemed to obscure the bright blue flames burning in the seven silver lamps. There was a creaking sound, as though an old and rusty-hinged door were being slowly opened, and the lids of the two mummy-cases to right and left of the central figure began to swing outward. And as they moved, the linen-banded thing in the center coffin seemed to writhe like a hibernating snake recovering life, and stepped out into the room!

"Colonel Putnam forgot Father and me completely. 'Daughter — Gretchen, Isabella, Francesca, Musepa, Tashamt, by whatever name or names you have been known throughout the ages, I charge you speak!' he cried, sinking on his knees and stretching out his hands toward the moving mummy.

"There came a gentle, sighing noise, then a light, tittering laugh, musical, but hard and metallic, as a thin, high voice replied: 'My father, you who loved and nurtured me in ages gone, I come to you at your command with those who serv-

ed me in the elder world; but we are weak and worn from our long rest. Give us to eat, father.'

" 'Aye, food shall ye have, and food in plenty,' Colonel Putnam answered. 'Tell me, what is it that ye crave?'

" 'Naught but the life-force of those strangers at your back,' the voice replied with another light, squeaking laugh. 'They must die if we would live . . .' and the sheeted thing moved nearer to us in the silver lamps' blue light.

"BEFORE THE Colonel could snatch up the pistol which had fallen from his hand, Father grabbed it, seized me with his free hand and dragged me from the house. Our car was waiting at the door, its engine still going, and we jumped in and started for the highroad at top speed.

"We were nearly out of the woods surrounding Putnam's house — the same woods I drove you through this afternoon — when I happened to look back. There, running like a rabbit, coming so fast that it was actually overtaking our speeding car, was a tall, thin man, almost fleshless as a skeleton, and apparently dressed in some dust-colored, close-fleeing kind of tights.

"But I recognized it! It was one of those things from the

mummy-cases we'd seen in Colonel Putnam's parlor!

"Dad crowded on more speed, but the dreadful running mummy kept gaining on us. It had almost overtaken us when we reached the edge of the woods and I happened to remember Father still had Colonel Putnam's pistol. I snatched the weapon from his pocket and emptied it at the thing that chased us, almost at pointblank range. I know I must have hit it several times, for I'm pretty good shot and the distance was too short for a miss, even allowing for the way the car was lurching, but it kept right on; then, just as we ran out into the moonlight at the woodland's edge, it stopped in its tracks, waved its arms at us and — vanished."

DeGrandin tweaked the sharply waxed ends of his little wheat-blond mustache. "There is more, *Mademoiselle*," he said at length. "I can see it in your eyes. What else?"

Miss Hawkins cast a startled look at him, and it seemed to me she shuddered slightly, despite the warming glow of the fire.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "there's more. Three days after that a party of young folks came up here on a camping-trip from New York. They were at the Ormond cabin down by Pine Lake, six of 'em;

a young man and his wife, who acted as chaperons, and two girls and two boys. The second night after they came, one of the girls and her boy friend went canoeing on the lake just at sundown. They paddled over to this side, where the Putnam farm comes down to the water, and came ashore to rest."

There was an air of finality in the way she paused. It was as if she had announced, "Thus the tale endeth," when she told us of the young folks' beaching their canoe, and de Grandin realized it, for, instead of asking what the next occurrence was, he demanded simply:

"And when were they found, *Mademoiselle*?"

"Next day, just before noon. I wasn't with the searching-party, but they told me it was pretty dreadful. The canoe paddles were smashed to splinters, as though they'd used them as clubs to defend themselves and broken them while doing so, and their bodies were literally torn limb from limb. If it hadn't been there was no evidence of any of them being eaten, the searchers would have thought a pair of panthers had pounced on them, for their faces were clawed almost beyond recognition, practically every shred of clothing ripped off them, and their arms and legs and heads

completely separated from their bodies."

"U'm? And blood was scattered all around, one imagines?" de Grandin asked.

"Nol Not a single drop of blood was anywhere in sight. Job Denham, the undertaker who received the bodies from the coroner, told me their flesh was pale and dry as veal. He said he couldn't understand it, but I . . ."

She halted in her narrative, glancing apprehensively across her shoulder at the window; then, in a low, almost soundless whisper: "The Bible says the blood's the life, doesn't it?" she asked. "And that voice we heard in Colonel Putnam's house told him those mummies wanted the vital force from Dad and me, didn't it? Well, I think that's the answer. Whatever it was it Colonel Putnam brought to life in his house three days before was what set on that boy and girl in Putnam's woods, and it — they — attacked them for their blood."

"Have similar events occurred, *Mademoiselle*?"

"Did you notice the farm land hereabouts as we drove over?" she asked irreverently.

"Not particularly."

"Well, it's old land; sterile. You couldn't raise so much as a mortgage on it. No one's tried to farm it since I can remem-

ber, and I'll be seventeen next January."

"Um; and so . . ."

"So you'd think it kind of funny for Colonel Putnam suddenly to decide to work his land, wouldn't you?"

"Perhaps."

"And with so many men out of work hereabouts, you'd think it queer for him to advertise for farmhands in the Boston papers, wouldn't you?"

"*Precisement, Mademoiselle.*"

"And for him to pay their railway fare up here, and their bus fare over from the station, and then get dissatisfied with 'em in a day or two — and for 'em to leave without anybody's knowing when they went, or *where* they went; then for him to hire a brand-new crew in the same way, and discharge *them* in the same way in a week or less?"

"*Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin answered in a level, almost toneless voice, "we consider these events somewhat more than merely queer. We think they have the smell of fish upon them. Tomorrow we shall call upon this estimable Putnam person, and he would be well advised to have a credible explanation in readiness."

"Call on Colonel Putnam? Not I!" the girl rejoined. "I wouldn't go near that house of his, even in daylight, for a million dollars!"

"Then I fear we must forego the pleasure of your charming company," he returned with a smile, "for we shall visit him, most certainly. Yes, of course."

"Meantime," he added, "we have had a trying day; is it agreeable that we retire? Doctor Trowbridge and I shall occupy the bunks in this room; you may have the inner room, *Mademoiselle.*"

"Please," she pleaded, and a flush mantled her face to the brows, "please let me sleep out here with you. I'd — well, I'd be scared to death sleeping in there by myself, and I'll be just as quiet — honestly, I won't disturb you."

She was unsupplied with sleeping-wear, of course; so de Grandin, who was about her stature, cheerfully donated a pair of lavender-and-scarlet striped silk pajamas, which she donned in the adjoining room, expending so little time in process that we had scarcely had time to doff our boots, jackets and cravats ere she rejoined us, looking far more like an adolescent lad than a young woman, save for those absurd pink-coral ear-studs.

"I wonder if you'd mind my using the 'phone?" she asked as she pattered across the rough-board floor on small and amazingly white bare feet. "I don't think it's been disconnected,

and I'd like to call Dad and tell him I'm all right."

"By all means, do so," bade de Grandin as he hitched the blanket higher on his shoulder. "We can understand his apprehension for your safety in the circumstances."

THE GIRL raised the receiver from the old-fashioned wall fixture, took the magneto crank in her right hand and gave it three vigorous turns, then seven slow ones.

"Hello? Dad?" she called. "This is Audrey; I'm — oh!" The color drained from her cheeks as though a coat of liquid white were sprayed across her face. "Dad — Dad — what is it?" she cried shrilly; then slowly, like a marionette being lowered by its strings, she wavered tottering a moment, let fall the telephone receiver and slumped in a pathetic little heap upon the cabin floor.

De Grandin and I were out of bed with a bound, the little Frenchman bending solicitously above the fainting girl, I snatching at the telephone receiver.

"Hullo, hullo?" I called through the transmitter. "Mr. Hawkins?"

"*Huh — hoh — huh-hoh-huh!*" the most fiendish, utterly diabolical chuckle I ever heard came to me across the wire. "*Huh — hoh — huh-hoh-huh!*"

Then click! the telephone connection broke, and though I repeated the three-seven ring I'd heard the girl give several times, I could obtain no answer, not even the faint buzzing which denotes an open wire.

"My father! Something dreadful has happened to him, I know!" moaned the girl as she recovered consciousness. "Did you hear it, too, Doctor Trowbridge?"

"I heard something, certainly; it sounded like a poor connection roaring in the wire," I lied. Then, as hopeful disbelief lightened in her eyes: "Yes, I'm sure that's what it was, for the instrument's quite dead, now."

Reluctantly reassured, Audrey Hawkins clambered into bed, and though she moaned once or twice with a little, whimpering sound, her buoyant youth and healthily tired young muscles staid her in good stead, and she was sleeping peacefully within an hour.

Several times, as de Grandin and I lay in silence, waiting for her to drop off, I fancied I heard the oddly terrifying squeaking sounds we'd noticed earlier in the evening, but I resolutely put all thought of what their probable origin might be from my mind, convinced myself they were the cries of nocturnal insects, and

— lay broad awake, listening for their recurrence.

"What was it that you heard in the telephone, Friend Trowbridge?" the little Frenchman asked me in a whisper when her continued steady, even breathing had assured us that our youthful guest was sound asleep.

"A laugh," I answered, "the most hideous, hellish chuckle I've ever listened to. You don't suppose her father could have laughed like that, just to frighten . . ."

"I do not think *Monsieur* her father has either cause for laughter or ability to laugh," he interrupted. "What it is that haunts these woods I do not surely know, my friend, though I suspect that the crack-brained Colonel Putnam let loose a horde of evil elementals when he went through that mummerly at his house last summer. However that may be, there is no doubt that these things, whatever be their nature, are of a most unpleasant disposition, intent on killing any one they meet, either from pure lust for killing or in order to secure the vital forces of their victims and thus increase their strength in a material form. It is my fear that they may have a special grudge against *Monsieur Hawkins* and his daughter, for they were the first people whose lives they sought, and they es-

caped, however narrowly. Therefore, having failed in their second attempt to do the daughter mischief this afternoon, they may have wreaked vengeance on the father. Yes, it is entirely possible."

"But it's unlikely," I protested. "He's over in Bartlesville, ten miles away, while she's right here; yet . . ."

"Yes, you were saying . . ." he prompted as a sudden unpleasant thought forced itself into my mind and stopped my speech.

"Why, if they're determined to do mischief to either *Hawkins* or his daughter, haven't they attempted to enter this house, which is so much nearer than her home?"

"*Eh bien*, I thought you might be thinking that," he answered dryly. "And are you sure that they have made no attempt to enter here? Look at the door, if you will be so good, and tell me what it is you see."

I glanced across the cabin toward the stout plank door and caught the ruddy reflection of the firelight on a small, bright object lying on the sill. "It looks like your hunting-knife," I told him.

"*Precisement*, you have right; it is my hunting-knife," he answered. "My hunting-knife, unsheathed, with its sharp point directed toward the door-sill. Yours is at the other entrance,

while I have taken the precaution to place a pair of heavy shears on the window-ledge. I do not think I wasted preparations, either, as you will probably agree if you will cast your eyes toward the window."

Obediently, I glanced at the single window of the room, then stifled an involuntary cry of horror; for there, outlined against the flickering illumination of the dying fire, stood an evil-looking, desiccated thing, skeleton-thin, dark, leather-colored skin stretched tightly as drum parchment on its skull, broken teeth protruding through retracted lips, tiny sparks of greenish light glowing malevolently in its cavernous, hollow eye-sockets. I recognized it at a glance; it was a mummy, an Egyptian mummy, such as I had seen scores of times while walking through the museums. And yet it was no mummy, either, for while it had the look of death and unnaturally delayed decay about it, it was also endued with some kind of dreadful life-in-death, for its little, glittering eyes were plainly capable of seeing, while its withered, leathery lips were drawn back in a grin of snarling fury, and even as I looked, they moved back from the stained and broken teeth in the framing of some phrase of hatred.

"Do not be afraid," de Gran-

din bade. "He can look and glare and make his monkey-faces all he wishes, but he can not enter here. The shears and knives prevent him."

"Y-you're sure?" I asked, terror gripping at my throat.

"Sure? To be sure I'm sure. He and his unpleasant playfellows would have been inside the cabin, and at our throats, long since, could they have found a way to enter. The sharpened steel, my friend, is very painful to him. Iron and steel are the most earthly of all metals, and exercise a most uncomfortable influence on elementals. They can not handle it, they can not even approach it closely, and when it is sharpened to a point it seems to be still more efficient, for its pointed end appears to focus and concentrate radiations of psychic force from the human body, forces which are highly destructive to them. Knowing this, and suspecting what it is that we have to do with from the story Mademoiselle Hawkins told us, I took precautions to place these discouragers at doors and window before we went to bed. *Tiens*, I have lain here something like an hour, hearing them squeak and gibber as they prowled around the house; only a moment since I noticed that thin gentleman peering in the window, and

thought you might be interested."

Rising, he crossed the cabin on tiptoe, so as not to wake the sleeping girl, and drew the bur-lap curtain across the window. "Look at that until your ugly eyes are tired, *Monsieur le Cadavre*," he bade. "My good Friend Trowbridge does not care to have you watch him while he sleeps."

"Sleep!" I echoed. "D'ye think I could sleep knowing *that's* outside?"

Parbleu, he is much better outside than in, I think," returned the Frenchman with a grin. "However, if you care to lie awake and think of him, I have no objections. But me, I am tired. I shall sleep; nor shall I sleep the worse for knowing that he is securely barred outside the house. No."

REASSURED, I finally fell asleep, but my rest was broken by unpleasant dreams. Sometime toward morning I awoke, not from any consciousness of impending trouble nor from any outward stimulus; yet, once my eyes were open, I was fully master of my faculties as though I had not slept at all. The pre-dawn chill was in the air, almost bitter in its penetrating quality; the fire which had blazed merrily when we said good-night now lay a heap of whitened ashes and feebly

smoldering embers. Outside the cabin rose a furious chorus of light, swishing, squeaking noises, as though a number of those whistling rubber toys with which small children are amused were being rapidly squeezed together. At first I thought it was the twittering of birds, then realized that the little feathered friends had long since flown to southern quarters; besides, there was an eery unfamiliarity in this sound, totally unlike anything I had ever heard until the previous evening, and it rose and gathered in shrill tone and volume as I listened. Vaguely, for no conscious reason, I likened it to the clamoring of caged brutes when feeding-time approaches in the zoo.

Then, as I half rose in my bunk, I saw an indistinct form move across the cabin. Slowly, very slowly, and so softly that the rough, uneven floor forbore to creak beneath her lightly pressing feet. Audrey Hawkins tiptoed toward the cabin door, creeping with a kind of feline grace. Half stupified, I saw her pause before the portal, sink stealthily to one knee, reach out a cautious hand . . .

"*Non, non; dix mille fois non* — you shall not do it!" de Grandin cried, emerging from his bunk and vaulting across the cabin, seemingly with a single movement, then grasping the

girl by the shoulders with such force that he hurled her half across the room. "What business of the fool do you make here, *Mademoiselle*?" he asked her angrily. "Do not you know that once the barriers of steel have been removed we should be — *mon Dieu*, one understands!"

Audrey Hawkins' hands were at her temples as she looked at him with innocent amazement while he raged at her. Clearly, she had wakened from a sound and dreamless sleep when she felt his hands upon her shoulders. Now she gazed at him in wonder mixed with consternation.

"Wh-what is it? What was I doing?" she asked.

"Ah, *parbleu*, you did nothing of your own volition, *Mademoiselle*," he answered, "but those other ones, those very evil ones outside the house, in some way they reached you in your sleep and made you pliable to their desires. *Ha*, but they forgot de Grandin; he sleeps, yes, but he sleeps the sleep of the cat. They do not catch him napping. But no."

We piled fresh wood upon the fire and, wrapped in blankets, sat before the blaze, smoking, drinking strong black coffee, talking with forced cheerfulness till the daylight came again, and when de Grandin put the curtain back and looked

out in the clearing round the cabin, there was no sign of any visitants, nor were there any squeaking voices in the woods.

III

BREAKFAST finished, we climbed into the ancient Ford and set out for Bartlesville, traveling at a speed I had not thought the ancient vehicle could make.

Hawkins' general store was a facsimile of hundreds of like institutions to be found in typical American villages from Vermont to Vancouver. Square as a box, it faced the village main street. Shop windows, displaying a miscellany of tinned groceries, household appliances and light agricultural equipment, occupied its front elevation. Shuttered windows piercing the second-story walls denoted where the family living-quarters occupied the space above the business premises.

Audrey tried the red-painted door of the shop, found it locked securely, and led the way through a neat yard surrounded by a fence of white picket, took a key from her trousers pockets and let us through the private family entrance.

Doctors and undertakers have a specialized sixth sense. No sooner had we crossed the threshold than I smelled death

inside that house. De Grandin sensed it, too, and I saw his smooth brow pucker in a warning frown as he glanced at me across the girl's shoulder.

"Perhaps it would be better if we went first, *Mademoiselle*," he offered. "*Monsieur* your father may have had an accident, and . . ."

"Dad — oh, Dad, are you awake?" the girl's call interrupted. "It's I. I was caught in Putnam's woods last evening and spent the night at Sutter's camp, but I'm — *Dad!* Why don't you answer me?"

For a moment she stood silent in an attitude of listening; then like a flash she darted down the little hall and up the winding stairs which led to the apartment overhead.

We followed her as best we could, cannoning into unseen furniture, barking our shins on the narrow stairs, but keeping close behind her as she raced down the upper passageway into the large bedroom which overlooked the village street.

The room was chaos. Chairs were overturned, the clothing had been wrenched from the big, old-fashioned bed and flung in a heap in the center of the floor, and from underneath the jumbled pile of comforter and sheets and blankets a man's bare foot protruded.

I hesitated at the doorway, but the girl rushed forward,

dropped to her knees and swept aside the veiling bedclothes. It was a man past early middle fifty, but looking older, she revealed. Thin, he was, with that starved-turkey kind of leanness characteristic of so many native New Englanders. His gray head was thrown back and his lean, hard-shaven chin thrust upward truculently. In pinched nostril, sunken eye and gaping open mouth his countenance bore the unmistakable seal of death. He lay on his back with arms and legs sprawled out at grotesque angles from the inadequate folds of his old-fashioned Canton flannel nightshirt, and at first glance I recognized the unnaturalness of his posture, for human anatomy does not alter much with death, and this man's attitude would have been impossible for any but a practiced contortionist.

Even as I bent my brows in wonder, de Grandin knelt beside the body. The cause of death was obvious, for in the throat, extending almost down to the left clavicle, there gaped a jagged wound, not made by any sharp, incising weapon, but rather, apparently, the result of some savage laniation, for the whole integument was ripped away, exposing the trachea to view — yet not a clot of blood lay round the ragged edges of the laceration, nor was

there any sign of staining on the nightrobe. Indeed, to the ordinary pallor of the dead there seemed to be a different sort of pallor added, a queer, unnatural pallor which rendered the man's weather-stained countenance not only absolutely colorless, but curiously transparent, as well.

"Good heavens . . ." I began, but:

"Friend Trowbridge, if you please, observe," de Grandin ordered, lifting one of the dead man's hands and rotating it back and forth. I grasped his meaning instantly. Even, allowing for the passage of *rigor mortis* and ensuing *post mortem* flaccidity, it would have been impossible to move that hand in such a manner if the radius and ulna were intact. The man's arm-bones had been fractured, probably in several places, and this, I realized, accounted for the posture of his hands and feet.

"Dad — oh, Daddy, Daddy!" cried the distracted girl as she took the dead man's head in her arms and nursed it on her shoulder. "Oh, Daddy dear, I knew that something terrible had happened when . . ."

Her outburst ended in a storm of weeping as she rocked her body to and fro, moaning with the helpless, inarticulate piteousness of a dumb thing

wounded unto death. Then abruptly:

"You heard that laugh last night!" she challenged me. "You know you did, Doctor Trowbridge — and there's where we heard it from," she pointed with a shaking finger at the wall-telephone across the room.

As I followed the line of her gesture I saw that the instrument had been ripped clear from its retaining bolts; its wires, its mouthpiece and receiver broken as though by repeated hammer-blows.

"They — those dreadful things that tried to get at us last night came over here when they found they couldn't reach me and murdered my poor father!" she continued in a low, sob-choked voice. "I know! The night Colonel Putnam raised those awful mummies from the dead the she-thing said they wanted our lives, and one of the others chased us through the woods. They've been hungering for us ever since, and last night they got Daddy. I . . ."

She paused, her slender bosom heaving, and we could see the tear drops dry away as fiery anger flared up in her eyes.

"Last night I said I wouldn't go near Putnam's house again for a million dollars," she told de Grandin. "Now I say I wouldn't stay away from there

for all the money in the world. I'm going over now — this minute — and pay old Putnam off. I'll face that villain with his guilt and make him pay for Daddy's life if it's the last thing I do!"

"It probably would be, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin answered dryly. "Consider, if you please: This so odious Monsieur Putnam is undoubtedly responsible for loosing those evil but while his life is forfeit for his crimes of necromancy, merely to kill him would profit us — and the community — not at all. These most unpleasant pets of his have gotten out of hand. I make no doubt that he himself is in constant, deadly fear of them, and that they, who came as servants of his will, are now his undisputed masters. Were we to kill him, we should still have those evil ones to reckon with, and till they have been utterly destroyed the country will be haunted by them; and others — countless others, perhaps — will share the fate of your poor father and that unfortunate young man and woman who perished on their boating-trip, not to mention those misguided workmen who answered Monsieur Putnam's advertisements. You comprehend? This is a war of extermination on which we are embarked; we must destroy or be destroyed. Losing our

lives in a gallant gesture would be a worthless undertaking. Victory, not speedy vengeance, must be our first and great consideration."

"Well, then, what are we to do, sit here idly while they range the woods and kill more people?"

"By no means, *Mademoiselle*. First of all, we must see that your father has the proper care; next, we must plan the work which lies before us. That done, it is for us to work the plans which we have made."

"All right, then, let's call the coroner," she agreed. "Judge Lindsay knows me, and he knew Dad all his life. When I tell him how old Putnam raised those mummies from the dead, and . . ."

"*Mademoiselle*!" the Frenchman expostulated. "You will tell him nothing about anything about anything which Monsieur Putnam has done. It has been two hundred years, unfortunately, since your kin and neighbors ceased paying such creatures as this Putnam for their sins with rope and flame. To tell your truthful story to the coroner would be but signing your commitment to the madhouse. Then, doubly protected by your incarceration and public disbelief in their existence, Monsieur Putnam's mummy-things could range the countryside at will. Indeed, it

is altogether likely that the first place they would visit would be the madhouse where you were confined, and there, defenseless, you would be wholly at their mercy. Your screams for help would be regarded as the ravings of a lunatic, and the work of extirpation of your family which they began last night would be concluded. Your life, which they have sought since first they came, would be snuffed out, and, with none to fight against them, the countryside would fall an easy prey to their vile depredations. *Eh bien*, who can say how far the slaughter would go before the pig-ignorant authorities, at last convinced that you had told the sober truth when they thought you raving, would finally arouse themselves and take befitting action? You see why we must guard our tongues, *Mademoiselle?*"

IV

NEWS OF THE murder spread like wildfire through the village. Zebulon Lindsay, justice of the peace, who also acted as coroner, empaneled a jury beforenoon; by three o'clock the inquisition had been held and a verdict of death by violence at the hands of some person or persons unknown was rendered.

Among the agricultural implements in Hawkins' stock de Grandin noted a number of bill-hooks, pike-like instruments with long, curved blades resembling those of scythes fixed on the ends of their strong helves.

"These we can use tonight, my friends," he told us as he laid three carefully aside.

"What for?" demanded Audrey.

"For those long, cadaverous things which run through Monsieur Putnam's woods, by blue!" he answered with a rather sour smile. "You will recall that on the first occasion when you saw them you shot one of their number several times?"

"Yes."

"And that notwithstanding you scored several hits, it continued its pursuit?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. You know the reason? Your bullets tore clear through its desiccated flesh, but had not force to stop it. *Tiens*, could you have knocked its legs off at the knees, however, do you think that it could still have run?"

"Oh, you mean . . ."

"Precisely, exactly; quite so, *ma chere*. I purpose dividing them, anatomizing them, striking them limb from limb. What lead and powder would be powerless to do, these instruments of iron will accomplish

very nicely. We shall go to their domain at nightfall; that way we shall be sure of meeting them. Were we to go by daylight, it is possible they would be hidden in some secret place, for like all their kind they wait the coming of darkness because their doings are evil.

"Should you see one of them, remember what he did to your poor father, *Mademoiselle*, and strike out with your iron. Strike and do not spare your blows. It is not as foeman unto foe we go tonight, but as executioners to criminals. You understand?"

WE SET out just at sundown, Audrey Hawkins driving, de Grandin and I, each armed with a stout billhook, in the rear seat.

"It were better that you stopped here, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin whispered as the big white pillars of the mansion's antique portico came in view between the trees. "There is no need to advertise our advent; surprise is worth a thousand men in battle."

We dismounted from the creaking vehicle and, our weapons on our shoulders, began a stealthily advance.

"S-s-st!" Audrey warned as we paused a moment by a little opening in the trees, our eyes intent upon the house. "Hear it?"

Very softly, like the murmur of a sleepy little bird, there came a subdued squeaking noise from a hemlock thicket twenty feet or so away. I felt the short hair on my neck begin to rise against my collar and a little chill of mingled hate and apprehension run rippling through my scalp and cheeks. It was like the sensation felt when one comes unexpectedly upon a serpent in the path.

"Softly, friends," Jules de Grandin ordered, grasping the handle of his billhook like a quarterstaff and leaning toward the sound; "do you stand by me, good friend Trowbridge, and have your flashlight ready. Play its beam on him the minute he emerges, and keep him visible for me to work on."

Cautiously, quietly as a cat stalking a mouse, he stepped across the clearing, neared the clump of bushes whence the squeaking came, then leant forward, eyes narrowed, weapon ready.

It burst upon us like a charging beast, one moment hidden from our view by the screening boughs of evergreen, next instant leaping through the air, long arms flailing, skeleton-hands grasping for de Grandin's throat, its withered, leather-like face a mask of hatred and ferocity.

I shot the flashlight's beam

full on it, but its terrifying aspect caused my hand to tremble so that I could scarcely hold the shaft of light in line with the heaping horror's movements.

Ca-ha, Monsieur le Cadavre, we meet again it seems!" de Grandin greeted in a whisper, dodging nimbly to the left as the mummy-monster reached out scrawny hands to grapple with him. He held the billhook handle in the center, left hand upward, right hand down, and as the withered leather talons missed their grasp he whirled the iron-headed instrument overhand from left to right, turning it as he did so, so that the carefully whetted edge of the heavy blade crashed with devastating force upon the mummy's withered biceps. The limb dropped helpless from the desiccated trunk, but, insensible to pain, the creature whirled and grasped out with its right hand.

Once more the billhook circled whistling through the air, this time reversed, striking downward from right to left. The keen-edged blade sheared through the lich's other arm, cleaving it from the body at the shoulder.

And now the withered horror showed trace of fear. Sustained by supernatural strength and swiftness, apparently devoid of any sense of pain, it

had not entered what intelligence the thing possessed that a man could stand against it. Now it paused, irresolutely a moment, teetering on its spindle legs and broad, splay feet, and while it hesitated thus the little Frenchman swung his implement again, this time like an axe, striking through dry, brown flesh and aged, brittle bone, lopping off the mummy's legs an inch or so above the knees.

Had it not been so horrible, I could have laughed aloud to see the withered torso hurtle to the ground and lie there, flopping grotesquely on stumps of arms and legs, seeking to regain the shelter of the hemlock copse as it turned its fleshless head and gazed across its bony shoulder at de Grandin.

"Hit it on the head! Crush its skull!" I advised, but:

"Non, this is better," he replied as he drew a box of matches from his pocket and lighted one.

Now utter terror seized the limbless lich. With horrid little squeaking cries it redoubled its efforts to escape, but the Frenchman was inexorable. Bending forward, he applied the flaming match to the tinder-dry body, and held it close against the withered skin. The fire caught instantly. As though it were compounded of a mass of oil-soaked rags, the mum-

my's body sent out little tongues of fire, surmounted by dense clouds of aromatic smoke, and in an instant was a blaze of glowing flame. De Grandin seized the severed arms and piled them on the burning torso so that they, too, blazed and snapped and crackled like dry wood thrown on a roaring fire.

"And that, I damn think, denotes the end of that," he told me as he watched the body sink from flames to embers, then to white and scarcely glowing ashes. "Fire is the universal solvent, the one true cleanser, my friend. It was not for nothing that the olden ones condemned their witches to be burned. This elemental force, this evil personality which inhabited that so unsavory mummy's desiccated flesh, not only can it find no other place to rest now that we have destroyed its tenement, but the good, clean, clarifying flames have dissipated it entirely. Never again can it materialize, never more enter human form through the magic of such necromancers as that *sacre* Putnam person. It is gone, disposed of — *pouf!* it is no longer anything at all.

"What think you of my scheme, *Mademoiselle*?" he asked. "Was I not the clever one to match iron and fire against them? Was it not laughable to see — *grand Dieu*, Friend Trowbridge — *where is she*?"

He leant upon his billhook, looking questingly about the edges of the clearing while I played my searchlight's beam among the trees. At length:

"One sees it perfectly," he told me. "While we battled with that one, another of them set on her and we could not hear her cries because of our engagement. Now .. ."

"Do — do you suppose it killed her as it did her father?" I asked, sick with apprehension.

"We can not say; we can but look," he answered. "Come."

Together we searched the woodland in an ever-widening circle, but no trace of Audrey Hawkins could we find.

"Here's her billhook," I announced as we neared the house.

Sticking in the bole of a tree, almost buried in the wood, was the head of the girl's weapon, some three inches of broken shaft adhering to it. On the ground twenty feet or more away lay the main portion of the helve, broken across as a match-stem might be broken by a man.

The earth was moist beneath the trees, and at that spot uncovered by fallen leaves or pine needles. As I bent to pick up Audrey's broken billhook, I noticed tracks in the loam — big, barefoot tracks, heavy at the toe, as though their maker

strained forward as he walked, and beside them a pair of wavy parallel lines — the toe-prints of Audrey's boots as she was dragged through the woods and toward the Putnam house.

"What now?" I asked. "They have taken her there, dead or alive, and . . ."

He interrupted savagely: "What can we do but follow? Me, I shall go into that *sacre* house, and take it down, plank by single plank, until I find her; also I shall find those others, and when I do . . ."

V

NO LIGHTS showed in the Putnam mansion as we hurried across the weed-grown, ragged lawn, tiptoed up the veranda steps and softly tried the handle of the big front door. It gave beneath our pressure, and in a moment we were standing in a lightless hall, our weapons held in readiness as we strove to pierce the gloom with straining eyes and held our breaths as we listened for some sound betokening an enemy's approach.

"Can you hear it, Trowbridge, *mon ami*?" he asked me in a whisper. "Is it not their so abominable squealing?"

I listened breathlessly, and from the passageway's farther end it seemed there came a series of shrill skirking squeaks,

as though an angry rat were prisoned there.

Treading carefully, we advanced along the corridor, pausing at length as a vague, greenish-blue glow appeared to filter out into the darkness, not exactly lightening into the darkness, making the gloom a little less abysmal.

We gazed incredulously at the scene presented in the room beyond. The windows were all closed and tightly shuttered, and in a semicircle on the floor there burned a set of seven little silver lamps which gave off a blue-green, phosphorescent glow, hardly sufficient to enable us to mark the actions of a group of figures gathered there. One was a man, old and white-haired, disgustingly unkempt, his deep-set dark eyes burning with a fanatical glow of adoration as he kept them fixed upon a figure seated in a high, carved chair which occupied a sort of dais beyond the row of glowing silver lamps. Beside the farther wall there stood a giant form, a great brown-skinned man with bulging muscles like a wrestler's and the knotted torso of a gladiator. One of his mighty hands was twined in Audrey Hawkins' short, blonde hair; with the other he was stripping off her clothes as a monkey skins a fruit. We heard the cloth rip as it parted underneath his

wrenching fingers, saw the girl's slim body snow white and lissome as a new-peeled hazel wand, then saw her thrown birth-naked on the floor before the figure seated on the dais.

Bizarre and terrifying as the mummy-creatures we had seen had been, the seated figure was no less remarkable. No mummy this, but a soft and sweetly rounded woman-shape, almost divine in bearing and adornment. Out of olden Egypt she had come, and with her she had brought the majesty that once had ruled the world. Upon her head the crown of Isis sat, the vulture cap with wings of beaten gold and blue enamel and the vulture's head with gem-set eyes, above it rearing upright horns of Hathor between which shone the polished-silver disk of the full moon, beneath them the ureus, emblem of Osiris.

About her neck was hung a collar of beaten gold close-studded with emeralds and blue lapis lazuli, and round her wrists were wide, bright bands of gold which shone with figures worked in red and blue enamel. Her breasts were bare, but high beneath the pointed bosoms was clasped a belt of blue and gold from which there draped a robe of thin, transparent linen gathered in scores of tiny, narrow pleats and fringed about the hem

with little balls of gleaming gold which hung an inch or so above the arching insteps of her long and narrow feet, on every toe of which there gleamed a jewel-set ring. In her left hand she held a golden instrument fashioned like a T-cross with a long loop at its top, while in her right she bore a three-lashed golden scourge, the emblem of Egyptian sovereignty.

All this I noted in a sort of wondering daze, but it was her glaring, implacable eyes which held me rooted to the spot. Like the eyes of a tigress or a leopardess they were, and glowing with a horrid inward light as though illumined from behind by the phosphorescence of an all-consuming, heatless flame.

Even as we halted spell-bound at the turning of the corridor we saw her raise her golden scourge and point it like an aiming weapon at Audrey Hawkins. The girl lay huddled in a small white heap where the ruthless giant had thrown her, but as the golden scourge was leveled at her she half rose to a crouching posture and crept forward on her knees and elbows, whimpering softly, half in pleading, half in fear, it seemed.

The fixed, set stare of hatred never left the seated woman's eyes as Audrey crawled across the bare plank floor, groveled

for an instant at the dais' lowest step, then raised her head and began to lick the other's white, jeweled feet as though she were a beaten dog which sued for pardon from its mistress.

I saw de Grandin's small, white teeth flash in the lamps' weird light as he bared them in a quick grimace. "I damn thing we have had enough of this, by blue!" he whispered as he stepped out of the shadows.

While I had watched the tableau of Audrey's degradation with a kind of sickened horror, the little Frenchman had been busy. From the pockets of his jacket and his breeches he extracted handkerchiefs and knotted them into a wad, then, drawing out a tin of lighter-fluid, he doused the knotted linen with the liquid. The scent of benzine mixed with ether spread through the quiet air as, his drenched handkerchiefs on on his billhook's iron head, he left the shadows, paused an instant on the door-sill, then struck a match and set the cloth ablaze.

"*Messieurs, Madame*, I think this little comedy is ended," he announced as he waved the fire-tipped weapon back and forth, causing the flames to leap and quicken with a ruddy, orange glow.

Mingled terror and surprise showed on the naked giant's face as de Grandin crossed the

threshold. He fell away a pace, then, with his back against the wall, crouched for a spring.

"You first, *Monsieur*," the Frenchman told him almost affably, and with an agile leap cleared the few feet separating them and thrust the blazing torch against the other's bare, brown breast.

I gasped with unbelief as I saw the virile, sun-tanned flesh take fire as though it had been tinder, blaze fiercely and crumble into ashes as the flames spread hungrily, eating up his chest and belly, neck and head, finally destroying writhing arms and legs.

The seated figure on the dais was cowering back in fright. Gone was her look of cold, contemptuous hatred; in its place a mask of wild, insensate fear had overspread her clear-cut, haughty features. Her red lips opened, showing needle-sharp white teeth, and I thought she would have screamed aloud in her terror, but all that issued from her gaping mouth was a little, squeaking sound, like the squealing of a mouse caught in a trap.

"And now, *Madame*, permit that I may serve you, also!" De Grandin turned his back upon the blazing man and faced the cringing woman on the throne.

She held up trembling hands to ward him off, and her frightened, squeaking cries redoubl-

ed, but inexorably as a mediæval executioner advancing to ignite the faggots round a condemned witch, the little Frenchman crossed the room, held out his blazing torch and forced the fire against her bosom.

The horrifying process of incineration was repeated. From rounded breast to soft, white throat, from omphalos to thighs, from chest to arms and from thighs to feet, the all-devouring fire spread quickly, and the woman's white and gleaming flesh blazed fiercely, as if it had been oil-soaked wood. Bones showed a moment as the flesh was burned away, then took the fire, blazed quickly for an instant, glowed to incandescence, and crumbled to white ash before our gaze. Last of all, it seemed, 'the fixed and staring eyes, still gleaming with a greenish inward light, were taken by the fire, blazed for a second with a mixture of despair and hatred, then dissolved to nothingness.

"*Mademoiselle*," de Grandin laid his hand upon the girl's bare shoulder, "they have gone."

AUDREY HAWKINS raised her head and gazed at him, the puzzled, non-comprehending look of one who awakens quickly from sound sleep upon her face. There was a question in her eyes, but her lips were mute.

"*Mademoiselle*," he repeated, "they have gone; I drove them out with fire. But *he* remains, my little one.." With a quick nod of his head he indicated Colonel Putnam, who crouched in a corner of the room, fluttering fingers at his bearded lips, his wild eyes roving restlessly about, as though he could not understand the quick destruction of the beings he had brought to life.

"He?" the girl responded dully.

"*Precisement*, *Mademoiselle* — he. The accursed one; the one who raised those mummies from the dead; who made this pleasant countryside a hell of death and horror; who made it possible for them to slay your father while he slept."

One of those unpleasant smiles which seemed to change the entire character of his comely little face spread across his features as he leant above the naked girl and held his bill-hook toward her.

"The task is yours by right of bereavement, *ma pauvre*," he told her, "but if you would that I do it for you . . ."

"No — no; let me!" she cried and leapt to her feet, snatching the heavy iron weapon from his hand. Not only was she stripped of clothing; she was stripped of all restraint, as well. Not Audrey Hawkins, civilized descendant of a line of prudishly

respectable New England rustics, stood before us in the silver lamps' blue light, but a primordial cave-woman, a creature of the dawn of time, wild with the lust for blood-vengeance; armed, furious, naked and unashamed.

"Come, Friend Trowbridge, we can safely leave the rest to her," de Grandin told me as he took my elbow and forced me from the room.

"But, man, that's murder!" I expostulated as he dragged me down the unlit hall. "That girl's a maniac, and armed, and that poor, crazy old man . . ."

"Will soon be safe in hell, unless I miss my guess," he broke in with a laugh. "Hark, is it not magnificent, my friend?"

A wild, high scream came to us from the room beyond, then a woman's cachinnating laugh, hysterical, thin-edged, but gloating; and the thudding beat of murderous blows. Then a weak, thin moaning, more blows; finally a little, groaning gasp and the sound of quick breath drawn through fevered lips to laboring lungs.

"And now, my friend, I think we may go back," said Jules de Grandin.

"ONE MOMENT, if you please, I have a task to do," he called as we paused on the portico. "Do you proceed with

Mademoiselle Audrey. I shall join you in a minute."

He disappeared inside the old, dark house, and I heard his boot-heels clicking on the bare boards of the hall as he sought the room where all that remained of Henry Putnam and the things he brought back from the dead were lying.

The girl leaned weakly against a tall porch pillar, covering her face with trembling hands. She was a grotesque little figure, de Grandin's jacket buttoned round her torso, mine tied kilt-fashion round her waist.

"Oh," she whispered with a conscience-stricken moan, "I'm a murderess. I killed him — beat him to death. I've committed murder!"

I could think of nothing comforting to say, so merely patted her upon the shoulder, but de Grandin, hastening from the house, was just in time to hear her tearful self-arraignment.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle,*" he contradicted, "you are nothing of the kind. Me, once in war I had to head the firing-party which put a criminal to death. Was I then his murderer? But no. My conscience makes no accusation. So it is with you. This Putnam one, this rogue, this miscreant, this so vile necromancer who filled these pleasant woods with squeaking, gibbering horrors,

was his life not forfeit? Did not he connive at the death of that poor boy and girl who perished in the midst of their vacation? But yes. Did not he advertise for laborers, that they might furnish sustenance for those evil things he summoned from the tomb? Certainly. Did not he loose his squeaking, laughing thing upon your father, to kill him in his sleep? Of course.

"Yet for these many crimes the law was powerless to punish him. We should have sent ourselves to lifelong confinement in a madhouse had we attempted to invoke the law's processes. *Alors*, it was for one of us to give him his deserts, and you, my little one, as the one most greatly wronged, took precedence.

"*Eh bien*," he added with a tug at his small, tightly waxed mustache, "you did make extremely satisfactory work of it."

Since Audrey was in no condition to drive, I took the ancient flivver's steering-wheel.

"Look well upon that bad old house, my friends," *de Grandin* bade as we started on our homeward road. "Its time is done."

"What d'ye mean?" I asked.

"Precisely what I say. When I went back I made a dozen little fires in different places. They should be spreading nicely by this time."

"I CAN understand why that mummy we met in the woods caught fire so readily," I told him as we drove through the woods, "but how was it that the man and woman in the house were so inflammable?"

"They, too, were mummies," he replied.

"Mummies? Nonsense! The man was a magnificent physical specimen, and the woman—well, I'll admit she was evil-looking, but she had one of the most beautiful bodies I've ever seen. If she were a mummy, I . . ."

"Do not say it, my friend," he broke in with a laugh; "eaten words are bitter on the tongue. They were mummies—I say so. In the woods, in *Monsieur Hawkins'* home, when they made unpleasant faces at us through the window of our cabin, they were mummies, you agree? *Ha*, but when they stood in the blue light of those seven silver lamps, the lights which first shone on them when they came to plague the world, they were to outward seeming the same as when they lived and moved beneath the sun of olden Egypt. I have heard such things.

"That necromancer, *von Meyer*, of whom *Monsieur Putnam* spoke, I know of him by reputation. I have been told by fellow occultists whose word I can not doubt that he has per-

fectured a light which when shone on a corpse will give it every look of life, roll back the ravages of years and make it seem in youth and health once more. A very brilliant man is that von Meyer, but a very wicked one, as well. Some day when I have nothing else to do, I shall seek him out and kill him to death for the safety of society.

"Can you drive a little faster?" he inquired as we left the

woods behind.

"Cold without your jacket?" I asked.

"Cold? *Mais non*. But I would reach the village soon, my friend. *Monseigneur le Juge*, who also acts as coroner, has a keg of most delicious cider in his cellar, and this afternoon he bade me call on him whenever I felt thirsty. *Morbleu*, I feel most vilely thirsty now!

"Hurry, if you please, my friend."

Mr. Jamison Alvarde was not what you would call a charming person. So his distress can well be imagined that morning when he found that his wife and friend had both been afflicted with what turned out to be incurable insanity. He could hardly spare anyone who cared!

It was only some time later, when Alvarde died, that his attorney read the account of what had really happened on that weekend — the horrifying story of *The Cloth of Madness*.

One of Seabury Quinn's most popular stories, this tale appears in the August 1965 issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*. It is still available at 50c per copy, postpaid, from Health Knowledge, Inc., 119 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10003.

the cauldron

FOR THE MANY readers who like to know something about the contributors to an issue of bizarre fiction, this department will present brief profiles; and, sneaky though it may be, we shall take advantage of the opportunity to mention the titles of our authors' stories which appeared in our sister publication, MAGAZINE OF HORROR, as well as the dates. Nor shall we fail to mention that all issues of MOH are available at 50c each (this includes cost of postage) from Health Knowledge, Inc., 119 Fifth Avenue, New York 10003.

If you like (translation: if we do not receive lots of letters from you, the readers, saying, *No — don't do it*), we shall include excerpts from your letters in future issues of this magazine, in *The Cauldron*, where we feel that they will be of general interest. But we promise you that, as in MOH, we shall not run such excerpts just for the sake of having a letter department; nor shall we allow this department to get out of hand to the point where a story would be crowded out because of it.

EDWARD D. HOCH is a publicity writer, residing in Rochester, New York, whose stories and articles have been appearing in mystery, fantasy, science fiction, western, and parapsychology magazines since 1955. He

started out with *Village of the Dead*, the first of a long series of tales about Simon Ark, and gradually branched out into the other fields mentioned above. He appears frequently in EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN and he has been seen in MAGAZINE OF HORROR with *The Maze and the Monster* (August 1963), *The Faceless Thing* (November 1963), and *The Empty Zoo* (November 1965).

ROBERT BLOCH graduated from letter-writer to author in the pages of WEIRD TALES with a short story, *The Feast in the Abbey*, in the January 1935 issue, and we counted some 70 appearances in that publication alone between 1935 and 1954. You will find various collections of his tales in soft covers and, of course, he is known world-wide for the novel and motion picture, *Psycho*. Science fictionists know him also as an indefatigable contributor to the many amateur publications issued by fantasy fans, with offerings mainly humorous, but often penetrating, and a magnificently witty MC at conventions and conferences. His story, *The Faceless God*, elicited a well-liked full color cover illustration by Gray Morrow, for the Winter 1965/66 issue of MAGAZINE OF HORROR.

H. P. LOVECRAFT was regarded by

lovers of weird fiction as among this century's greatest masters of the weird tale; and since his death in 1937, his reputation has grown far beyond the limited circle of magazine readers, very largely due to the dedicated efforts of a fellow author, August Derleth, who, with Donald Wandrei inaugurated a publishing firm (Arkham House) for the initial purpose of perpetuating Lovecraft's work. HPL remains a controversial author, as more and more serious critics of literature examine the worth (or expound their reasons for proclaiming the worthlessness) of his contributions. Lovecraft was an amateur author all his life in the sense that (with two exceptions) all his fiction was written for his own satisfaction, rather than slanted toward the requirements of any particular market — even WEIRD TALES, where he appeared most frequently. *The Lurking Fear* is one of the two stories he wrote "to order", and he thus had a rather low opinion of it; without arguing its merit in comparison to what HPL considered his best work, we consider it an effective chiller. His novelet, *The Dreama in the Witch-House*, appeared in the May 1964 issue of MAGAZINE OF HORROR, and *The Shuttered Room*, with August Derleth, appeared in the January 1965 issue.

EDGAR ALLAN POE, for reasons which remain obscure (or perhaps we should say incomprehensible) to your editor is regarded in America as a sublime poet, while his fiction comes in for as severe exception-taking as that of Lovecraft at the hands of serious critics. In France, and elsewhere outside the USA, Poe has been regarded as a master of the short story ever since the controversial French poet, Charles Baudelaire, translated most of the tales a century ago, while the poetry is less well thought of; and we concur with the French on this. We offered one of his lesser-known tales, *The Oblong*

Box, in the January 1965 issue of MAGAZINE OF HORROR.

AUGUST DERLETH wrote his first story at the age of 14, and sold it to WEIRD TALES, where it appeared in the May 1926 issue (the story was *Bat's Belfry*). He has had some 5000 pieces published since, and more than 108 books (including collections and anthologies). His publishing venture, Arkham House, has maintained admirable standards both of physical production and content since its inception in 1939; he is known chiefly for weird fiction and his most enjoyable pastiches of Sherlock Holmes in the series of tales about Solar Pons and Dr. Parker. The present story is from a collection which will appear as a book entitled *Harrigan's File*. Derleth's powerful weird tale, *The Pacer*, appeared in the November 1964 issue of MAGAZINE OF HORROR, along with excerpts from his article, *Lovecraft as Mentor*, which related to HPL's suggestions for improving the first draft of that tale, which the then quite young author sent him. Most of *The Shuttered Room*, which we mentioned above is the work of August Derleth.

SEABURY GRANDIN QUINN was already well and favorably known to readers of WEIRD TALES, in 1925, when his story, *The Horror on the Links* appeared in the October issue of that year, containing one Dr. Samuel Trowbridge and one Professor Jules de Grandin, who solved a particularly bizarre mystery. Readers were delighted, and were pleased even more when further stories about this pair appeared; after a few tales, de Grandin received his doctorate. The series ran to 93 stories, including one novel, *The Devil's Bride*, which many consider as the best serial that Farnsworth Wright ever published during his editorship of WT (1924 to 1940). We have presented three non-de-Grandin tales by Quinn

in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*: *The Phantom Farmhouse*, (January 1965), *The Cloth of Madness* (August 1965), and *Master Nicholas* (Winter 1965/66).

GERALD W. PAGE made his initial appearance as an author in the August 1965 issue *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* with a short-short tale, *The Tree*. This is his second published story.

S. B. H. HURST appeared frequently in the companion magazine to *WEIRD TALES*, *ORIENTAL STORIES* (title changed later to *MAGIC CARPET*) between 1930 and 1932, but strangely enough never wrote for *WT*. The one weird tale of which we have any record is the present one, which ran in the initial issue of *STRANGE TALES*, September 1931.

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Aug. 1963: *The Man With A Thousand Legs* by Frank Belknap Long; *The Yellow Sign* by Robert W. Chambers; *The Unbeliever* by Robert Silverberg; *The Last Dawn* by Frank Lillie Pollock; *Babylon: 70 M.* by Donald A. Wollheim; *The Maze and the Monster* by Edward D. Hoch.

Nov. 1963: *Clarissa* by Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Space-Eaters* by Frank Belknap Long; *The Charmer* by Archie Blinn; *The Faceless Thing* by Edward D. Hoch; *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes* by Rudyard Kipling; *The Electric Chair* by George Waight.

Feb. 1964: *The Seeds of Death* by David H. Keller; *The Repairer of Reputations* by Robert W. Chambers; *The Place of the Pythons* by Arthur J. Burks; *The Seeking Thing* by Janet Hirsch; *They That Wait* by H. S. W. Chibbett; *Jean Bouchon* by S. Baring-Gould; *Lucella Miller* by Mary Wilkins-Freeman.

May 1964: Sorry — all gone!

Sept. 1964: *Cassius* by Henry S. Whitehead; *The Ghostly Rental* by Henry James; *The House of the Worm* by Merle Prout; *Five-Year Contract* by J. Vernon Shea; *The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing* by Walt Liebacher; *Bones* by Donald A. Wollheim.

Nov. 1964: *Caverns of Horror* by Laurence Manning; *The Mask* by Robert W. Chambers; *The Pacer* by August Derleth; *The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde* by Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Door to Saturn* by Clark Ashton Smith.

Jan. 1965: *The Shuttered Room* by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth; *The Phantom Farmhouse* by Seabury Quinn; *The Thing From — Outside* by George Allan England; *Black Thing at Midnight* by Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Shadows on the Wall* by Mary Wilkins-Freeman.

Apr. 1965: *The Dead Who Walk* by Ray Cummings; *The Hand of Glory* by R. H. D. Barham; *The Black Laugh* by William J. Makin; *Orpheus's Brother* by John Brunner; *The Burglar-Proof Vault* by Olver Taylor; *Jack* by Reynold Junker.

June 1965: *The Whistling Room* by William Hope Hodgson; *Skulls in the Stars* by Robert E. Howard; *The Distortion out of Space* by Francis Flagg; *The Night Wire* by H. F. Arnold; *Sacrilege* by Wallace West.

Aug. 1965: *The Cloth of Madness* by Seabury Quinn; *Placide's Wife* by Kirk Mashburn; *The Torture of Hope*, by Villies de L'Isle-Adam; *The Girl at Heddon's* by Pauline Kappel Priluck; *Come Closer* by Joanna Russ.

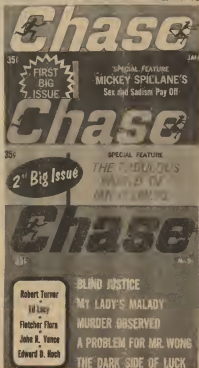
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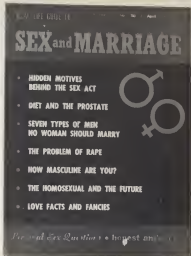
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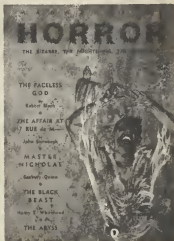
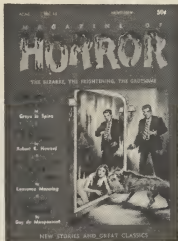
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